YOGA VASISHTA

in English by **Dr. Ramesam Vemuri**

Based on the original book in Telugu by

BRAHMASRI KUPPA VENKATA KRISHNA MURTY

BOOK 2

MUMUKSHU VYAVAHARA PRAKARANA

THE CONDUCT OF A SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

Revised edition 2025

YOGA VASISHTA

BOOK 2

MUMUKSHU VYAVAHARA PRAKARANA

THE CONDUCT OF A SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

About the Book

Yoga Vasishta is a treasure house of ancient Indian philosophical wisdom. It offers logical and practical answers to questions like: What is Mind? What is the world? What is the purpose of existence? What is Brahman?
It is a poetic classic by the Sage Valmiki explaining the nature of The Supreme Self expounded in his own inimitable and graceful way as a Discourse between Maharshi Vasishta and Lord Sri Rama.
The present volume, "Yoga Vasishta"– Book 2 - Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana - 'The Conduct of a Spiritual Aspirant', is based on a presentation in Telugu by

Brahmasri Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murty
Vidyadhikari and Editor, Bhaktimala, Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Ashram, Mysore, India

and forms a part of his lectures on "Yoga Vasishta" telecast in Telugu by Gemini TV, Hyderabad, Telangana State, India.

This volume is a rendering of the same into English by

Dr. Ramesam Vemuri,
Former Adviser, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, New Delhi, India.

In this Book :
The 1000 stanzas of the Second chapter on Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana - 'The Conduct of a Spiritual Aspirant' have been ably condensed and lucidly explained in simple words.

This chapter starts with the Story of Shuka and proceeds forward to establish that there is no agency called "destiny" and that it is the present and past actions (karma) of the individual that show their effects in his/her current life. It further emphasizes that the actions taken in the present birth are much more important and powerful than the past ones. The Chapter also introduces the reader to certain basic Vedantic words and concepts so that the teachings in the subsequent chapters can be easily followed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... 2
AUTHOR'S SUBMISSION.....4
FOREWORD.....9
1. HISTORY OF SHUKA..... 9
2. LOGICAL ANALYSIS.....10
3. UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURAL APHORISMS..... 16
4. JANAKA'S TEACHING.....18
5. SAGE VISWAMITRA'S TEACHING.....20
6. VASISHTA'S DISCOURSES..... 23
7. THREE SPACES..... 24
8. WHAT IS SUBTLETY?..... 25
9. SPACE IS MATTER.....25
10. PERVASIVENESS..... 25
11. CONSCIOUSNESS-SPACE.....26
12. THE KINGDOM OF THE MIND..... 26
13. BIRTH OF INDIVIDUALS..... 27
14. BIRTH SEQUENCE OF VYASAS.....27
15. WHAT IS A KALPA?.....28
16. LIBERATION WITH THE BODY.....28
17. EX-OFFICIO AUTHORITY.....29
18. ATTAINMENT OF LIBERATION.....30
19. SAGE VASISHTA'S PLAN OF TEACHING..... 31
20. HUMAN EFFORT.....32
21. DESTINY IS ACTION.....33
22. TYPES OF HUMAN EFFORT..... 33
23. PAST ACTION AND PRESENT ACTION..... 34
24. DOMINANCE OF THE PRESENT ACTION..... 35
25. SADHANA.....36
26. FOUR FOLD AIDS OF SEEKING.....36
27. THREE APPROACHES.....42
28. INDOLENCE..... 43
29. DOES DESTINY EXIST?.....44
30. THE TRIAD OF THROBS.....46
31. DESTINY IS A WORD OF SOLACE..... 48
32. IS DESTINY THE DOER OR A TOOL?.....49
33. DESTINY IS SPACE-LIKE.....51
34. WHY BLAME THE DESTINY ?.....52
35. THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL.....53
36. PREVENTION OF BAD samskāra-s..... 54
37. INNER SELF PRIMES THE ACTIONS..... 54
38. WHAT IS INDEPENDENCE?..... 56
39. WHAT IS ACTION?..... 57
40. WHO IS THE 'DOER'?.....57
41. GOD IS INDEPENDENT..... 58

42. YOU ARE THE 'DOER'..... 59
43. TURNING THE MIND TO GOOD ACTION..... 60
44. GOOD THOUGHTS ARE THE ANTIDOTE..... 61
45. ARE THE SAMSKARA-S JUST A PRESUMPTION?..... 62
46. HAPPINESS-BLISS..... 63
47. TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE DISCUSSION..... 64
48. 'NIYATI'..... 65
49. SERMON BY BRAHMA..... 67
50. ORIGINATION OF SAGE VASISHTA..... 69
51. EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS OF IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE..... 71
52. DISCRIMINATORY WISDOM..... 72
53. THE TEACHERS AND THE TAUGHT..... 73
54. SELF-INQUIRY..... 74
55. SHRAVANA, MANANA, NIDHIDHYASA..... 76
56. SHAMA..... 77
57. VICHARA..... 80
58. FALLACIOUS MIND..... 84
59. SANTOSHA..... 87
60. SADHU SANGAMA (Association with Holy People)..... 87
61. STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT..... 89
62. ENTIRE UNIVERSE IN A GRAIN..... 91
63. ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES..... 95
64. RELATIVE COMPARISONS..... 96
65. AWAKE AND DREAM WORLDS..... 97
66. EPHEMERAL AND EMPERICAL REALITIES..... 100
67. COMMONALITY IN THE DREAM AND WAKEFUL WORLDS..... 101
68. Brahman IS IMMUTABLE..... 102
69. SINGLE SENTENCE..... 103
70. FROM THE MOTHER WITH LOVE..... 104
71. HOW LONG SHOULD ONE INQUIRE?..... 105
72. DIRECT PERCEPTION..... 106
73. KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THE SENSES..... 108
74. vṛitti vyāpti – phalavyāpti..... 109
75. ONE CONSCIOUSNESS BUT MANY NAMES..... 110
76. INQUIRY AT THE STAGE OF LIBERATION..... 110
77. WHICH IS FIRST – MIND OR MATTER?..... 112
78. Brahman AND THE WORLD..... 113
79. CONDUCT OF A SEEKER..... 115
80. REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER..... 116

YOGA VASISHTA

BOOK 2
THE CONDUCT OF A SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT
(MUMUKSHU VYAVAHARA PRAKARANA)

AUTHOR'S SUBMISSION

Why does an author keep the core message of his writing hidden deep inside his heart ?

He does so with the hope that the teaching would shine with double the vigor when a reader finally finds it. Because of that reason, he doesn't seal it securely in an iron vault; he only tucks it behind the tender petals of a colorful flower. His wish is that his heart should be accessible– but only to those readers who make a little effort to unravel it. Thus goes the thinking of great writers and poets; and in there lies the inner meaning of their poetic works.

The Celebrated Poet Kalidasa described the Sage Valmiki as the greatest of the spiritual guides. These words are very apt with respect to Yoga Vasishta. The poetic skills of any author may sparkle all by themselves when telling the story of a noble warrior and King like Shri Rama, or in narrating the end of the demon, Ravana. But writing a tome on the theme of a bone dry and abstruse subject like Vedanta with lyrical beauty, extending the text to 32,000 verses without losing the gravity in the discussions or the detail in narration in a gripping manner till the very end bespeaks of the immense capability of the Sage Valmiki. No other writer has attained such levels of excellence to date.

I consider myself blessed. Thanks to the benevolence and grace showered on me by my Gurus, Swami Janardanananda Saraswati and Swami Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda, I could fathom without much of an effort on my part, the depths of Sage Valmiki's heart and his teaching contained in Yoga Vasishta. With the purpose of sharing my understanding with all my fellow-seekers, I began a series of discourses on Yoga Vasishta on Gemini TV.

Inspired by the words of my teachers, I was tempted to investigate the inner meaning of Sage Valmiki's teaching. I was aided in my search by the redoubtable Saint Shri Ananda Bhodendra Saraswati Swami. His voluminous commentary on Yoga Vasishta under the title "tātparyaprakāśa vyākhya" repeatedly helped me in capturing the heights of knowledge disseminated in the text. This gave me the courage to gain the fruits of studying Yoga Vasishta.

Let me first introduce the venerable text Yoga Vasishta.

About Yoga Vasishta:

1. **Author**: Sage Valmiki
2. **Period of writing**: Some time after the completion of his earlier book, Ramayana.
3. **Alternate names** by which this book is known: jnānavāśiṣṭha, vāśiṣṭharāmāyaṇa, ūttara rāmāyaṇa, mahārāmāyaṇa, vāśiṣṭha etc. etc.

4. **Size of the text**: The original text of the *Yoga Vasishta* is traditionally said to comprise 32,000 verses. However, some scholars opine that the actual count may be less than 30,000 (based on the Nirnaya Sagar 1937 Edition). It should be noted that quantifying a work of such a magnitude and intricacy is a complex task. Ultimately, an overly critical investigation into the exact verse count offers little value to the reader in terms of absorbing the text's spiritual message.
5. **Subject matter**: Inquiry into the Supreme Self. It comprises the teaching given to the 12 year old prince Rama by the Sages Vishwamitra and Vasishta. The book establishes that the man enlightened by the wisdom of knowing the highest truth will be able to function with excellence in this world.
6. **The style of Narration and other specialtie**s:

- The gist of each topic to be discussed is summarized upfront.
- The subject is illustrated through a captivating story.
- The symbolical significance of the characters used in the stories is explained by the author himself.
- The object of the text is not about the denying or contradicting any other theories.
- There are no polemic debates.
- The author raises a number of questions from various angles and answers them himself.
- Though the subject matter is that of tough Vedanta, one can see the poetic skills of the author at innumerable instances.
- The text is full of unimaginable metaphors that capture the reader's heart.
- The dominant Sanskrit meter used in this composition is *Anustup Chandas*, a rhythmic structure traditionally employed in spiritual texts. According to the rules of this meter, each *sloka* consists of 32 syllables. In this context, it is interesting to consider the mystery and significance of the number 32 in Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy. The number 32 represents completeness, a set of significant spiritual principles, or a state of divine order and balance. While the *Anustup* meter prevails, Sage Valmiki also employs other meters to suit specific contextual nuances within the work.

7. **Abridged Versions:**

- As the text is quite voluminous, many condensed versions of the book have been prepared both in the Northern and Southern parts of India. Some of the more popular versions are:
- The text by the Kashmiri Pundit Abhinandana comprising 6,000 verses.
- The text by Shri Swami Vidya Prakasananda Giri, Head of the Shukabrahma Ashram, Kalahasti having 8,000 verses.

8. **Translations:** Translations of the text are available in almost all languages. There are six translations in Telugu language itself -- five in prose form and one as verses. I consulted all these books in my work and I am indebted to those authors. Out of these, the translation by Shri M. Subbaraya Sharma was particularly helpful to me.

9. **Expert views:** Yoga Vasishta is highly revered not only during the old historical times, but also in modern days by the spiritual teachers.

   For example:

   - Swami Ramatirtha described Yoga Vasishta as the "most wonderful" text.
   - The book is highly revered by the Malayala Swami, The Head of the Erpedu Vyasa Ashram.
   - Yoga Vasishta is acclaimed as the foremost amongst the books on Advaita by the Head of Gayatri Peetha.

10. Structure of Yoga Vasishta:

There are six chapters in the text.

- *Vairāgyaprakaraṇa* -- On Detachment -- 1,500 verses -This first chapter describes in detail the feelings of detachment experienced by Shri Rama.
- *Mumukśu Vyavahāra Prakaraṇa* – On the Conduct of a piritual Aspirant -- 1,000 verses. This second chapter gives the details of the basic qualities to be attained by a spiritual aspirant. The importance of human effort in achieving liberation is discussed and it has been established that it is necessary that an effort should be made to obtain liberation.
- *Utpattiprakaraṇa* – On Origination -- 7,000 verses –This third chapter examines the reality of the visible world and if it has been created at all.
- *Sthitiprakaraṇa* – On Sustenance -- 3,000 verses – This fourth chapter investigates how the apparent world is sustained.
- *Upaśamaprakaraṇa* – On the Calm Down -- 5,000 verses - This fifth chapter talks of the method of obtaining a tranquil mind through True Knowledge.
- *Nirvāṇaprakaraṇa* – On Liberation -- 14,500 verses –This sixth and the final chapter is the largest wherein the achievement of Liberation is discussed thoroughly. It is divided into two parts - *Pūrvārdha and Uttarārdha*.

11. **Commentaries:** It is said that there are many commentaries in Sanskrit on YogaVasishta. However, only "tātparyaprakāśikā" by Swami Ananda Bhodhendra Saraswati is available in print. It was published by the NirnayaSagar Press in 1937. This commentary has received accolades from many learned pundits.

About Author Valmiki: It is opined by some experts that the author Valmiki of Yoga Vasishta was different from the author Valmiki of Ramayana. One group of such people belong to those that are opposed to Non-dualist philosophy. Their main concern is only to deprecate the importance of Yoga Vasishta as it is an unrivalled text on Non-duality. The other group contends that an evaluation on the authorship is called for using modern techniques rather than going by the word of tradition. Let us examine critically the various arguments advanced by this group.

The writing style of both Ramayana and Yoga Vasishta is about the same. In fact, no critic has been able to point out any major differences. However, some of these critics ask why there is not even a hint made about Yoga Vasishta in Ramayana. The answer to this question is available right in the first chapter of Yoga Vasishta. One may take a look.

The second argument is that because we find reference to Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna, Arjuna, Sage Suka and others in Yoga Vasishta, it should belong to a period later than that of Bhagavad-Gita. But if we keep in mind the caliber and skill of a writer who could handle a complex and intricate subject as Advaita Vednata with such a dexterity as found in the book, it is unlikely that we will be persuaded to conclude that such an enlightened and exceptionally competent author belonging to a later period would have tried to create a false impression about the date of his work. Hence, it is untenable to argue that it belongs to the post-Bhagavad-Gita period.

A question may, however, arise about the reference to the events of later eons (*yuga*) in the text. But inclusion of a reference to the events that are likely to take place at a future date is quite typical of the Sage Valmiki. He did so in his other and more popular work, Ramayana too. In fact, in the Balakanda of Ramayana, his narration cuts across past, present and future times in the description of different events. Sage Valmiki resorts to this type of narrating the future in uttarakanda of Ramayana also. Thus the narration of future events as seen by him through clairvoyance is a characteristic of the Sage Valmiki. It is no wonder that we find examples of such descriptions of future events in Yoga Vasishta also. In fact, whenever a future event is described, the author raises a question through one of the characters in the book about the chronological inconsistency and a suitable reply is given right there. Readers familiar with the works of other great Seers and Sages do not find this style of writing odd at all. For example, we find future events being narrated at a current time in Agastya Samhita. Sage Vyasa authored an entire purana which describes the future events only.

Thus when viewed with an unbiased eye, it is inevitable to conclude that the author of Yoga Vasishta and Ramayana was one and the same poet.

Further, we have to note that the Sage Valmiki was not only a writer *par excellence*, but also a great Maharishi. The word 'Rishi' in Sanskrit means the one who realized the ultimate Truth (*tatva*). A true writer is one who can speak accurately. Because he has both these qualities, he could write with such a depth of understanding and beauty. We notice several instances of this signature style of the Sage in both Ramayana and Yoga Vasishta.

I studied and tried to decipher the core message of Yoga Vasishta and the commentaries on it with the same spirit. I took help from elders, prayed to my teachers, and also consulted the teachings of Shri Janardanananda Swami who was not only a noble saint but also happened to be my father before his renunciation of the world. What I could understand is presented by me in my discourses that were telecast by the Gemini TV and the same is now offered in the form of a text. That is the reason it is called as the 'heart' of Yoga Vasishta.

We find a variation in spelling of the name of the Sage Vasishta. It is written in the Devanagari script both as Vaśiṣṭha and Vasiṣṭha. Both ways are correct as the former spelling is derived to mean as the one who conquered his senses and the latter one means the one who excelled as a householder.

Sage Vasishta himself clarified that writing his name either way was acceptable as quoted in a verse in Mahabharata (Canto 13, Chapter 63, verse 96). I adopted 'Vaśiṣṭha' in my writings as it would emphasize the importance of control, over the senses which is an important requisite in the study of Vedanta.

Acknowledgements:

All words are inadequate to express my indebtedness to my Teacher, Swami Ganapati Sachchidnananda. Therefore, I dedicate this work to him. I am also grateful to Gemini TV for telecasting my discourses. I tried to present the teaching contained in Yoga Vasishta in a logical manner and with a modern idiom. Please condone any omissions or commissions. However, my request to the readers is that this presentation should not be treated to be a condensation or abridgement of the original text. It is an effort to capture the "core" message and please study it in that spirit.

I am only nominally there in delivering this message. The inner sentient principle that motivates, acts and speaks is different. I pray to my Gurus to channel the Grace of that inexplicable principle to all in experientially realizing It.

Salutations to the Gurus.

Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murthy

FOREWORD

mumukśatvam , the last of the four qualities needed in a true seeker of Self-Knowledge, is a compelling desire for liberation. *Mumukhsu* is one who is gripped by such an intense desire. A *mumukśu*, after observing and inquiring into the state of worldly affairs, normally moves forward to reach the logical conclusion. If he is confused, he gets dejected and loses peace of mind. Many seekers of Self-Knowledge could face this situation. Sri Rama reached such a situation. In spite of his in-depth analysis, he has not yet attained Absolute Peace. Maharshi Valmiki, explains in this chapter, the way to overcome such situations. He illustrates in this chapter, the real life examples of the struggles and problems faced by a seeker, the variety of doubts he gets, the vacillations and swings he goes through and how he surmounts all those impediments to finally reach the desired goal. This chapter is aptly called *ṃumukśu vyavahara Prakarana..*

Maharshi Valmiki begins with the story of Sage Shuka, who was comparable to Rama in his eligibility and readiness. He describes the travails Shuka went through in the attainment of the Supreme Knowledge.

[**Note:** A question may arise again about the chronological accuracy and reliability of the story of Shuka. Rama belonged to *treta yuga* and Shuka belonged to *dwāpara yuga*. How then could the story of the latter be cited as an example for Rama? This doubt was already clarified in the previous chapter. In every '*kalpa*', '*manvantara*' and '*yuga*', the lives of celebrities are almost similar. So, just as the Vyasa of a subsequent *yuga* had Shuka as his son, the Vyasa of the previous *dwāpara yuga* also had a Shuka as his son. These cycles of time and life repeat through time. Hence, the story of Shuka cited in the Yoga Vasishta was that of a Shuka who belonged to the *dwāpara yuga* of the previous *kalpa*.]

1. HISTORY OF SHUKA

Maharshi Viswamitra was by nature very frank and straightforward. He was extremely pleased with the self-analysis of Sri Rama. Further, Viswamitra felt very much encouraged by the words of Maharshi Narada and others that he should respond to the queries of Sri Rama. Viswamitra said, "Sri Rama! You have already captured the crux of the matter. Your condition now is very similar to that of Maharshi Shuka. He went to King Janaka with similar questions as yours. After listening to Janaka's words, Shuka could gain the clarity which removed all his doubts. Shuka, thus attained eternal peace. It seems that there is a need to clear your doubts, like dust is erased from the surface of a mirror to view one's reflection clearly".

At that point, Sri Rama interrupted the Sage and prayed to him: "Maharshi! You said that Shuka was not initially at peace but later on achieved absolute happiness. Kindly throw more light on this. Please enlighten me on how he could achieve eternal peace."

Thereon, Maharshi Viswamitra narrated the story of Shuka as follows:.

Viswamitra: "Sri Rama! Shuka, the son of Vyasa, was accustomed to regular meditation at his father's hermitage. Soon he started to introspect and examine his own journey of life. His thoughts also went much like yours. He too developed a discriminating outlook and eventually grasped the essence of the ultimate truth (*tatva jnāna*).

As a consequence, he felt that there was neither a need for him to perform any actions nor a desire for the results of his actions. Shuka analysed subtle aspects of life further and his confidence began to waver due to confusion. The knowledge he gained would not let him take up ritualistic karma; and his uncertain mind does not allow him to give up performance of karmic actions. He struggled with this dilemma in his mind for considerable time. By the time he reached this stage, both Shuka and his father Vyasa relinquished their mortal coils and were dwelling with their subtle bodies on Mount Meru.

Maharshi Vyasa was a well-known authority on philosophical knowledge and he used to be always immersed in deep meditation. Shuka could not understand why his father needed such intense meditation, even after acquiring phenomenal wisdom.

One day, Shuka inquired with his father: "Revered father! I have been seized with doubt and getting tormented by it. Kindly solve my problem. From the world of human beings to Brahmaloka, every living creature sees a world around him. How did this world come into being? How will it disappear? At the behest of what does the world arise? Is it because of the body or the sensory organs? Or is it because of the mind or life- force (*prāṇa*)? Or a combination of all of them? Or do you say that this world is a scourge to the attributeless Consciousness ? Whatever may be the reason for it, I am beset with misery. What is the means to be free of sorrow?"

Vyasa was delighted with his son's inquiry. Vyasa was so knowledgeable that he could deliver a detailed discourse on this subject, perhaps longer than the voluminous epic – Mahabharata, that he authored. Alternatively, he could express himself very concisely as he did in Brahma sutras (a treatise in the form of cryptic aphorisms on the Supreme Self). He thought it over for a while and decided to adopt a midway in educating his son. Vyasa's exposition was as follows.

2. LOGICAL ANALYSIS

Vyasa: My Boy! There are two important questions that you have raised. The first one is, 'Who is bound by this world?' and the second one is 'How one could be free from it?.

Let us take up the first question now. You have already thought over it. You asked whether it was the body, or the organs of the body or the mind or all of them or the unchanging Consciousness that was bound.

Why are you concerned about who is bound by the world ? If you want to know the reason for your sorrow, it is necessary that you should first know who you are. Think over that.

It looks as though you are your body. Why? Because you feel the pain when this body is injured! But, if you examine closely, there is no scope to think that this body is you. Because, you refer to the body as "This is my body.". When you say, "this is my house", it is clear that you are different from your house! When you say this is my book, the book and you are not the same. Similarly, when you say, "this is my body", you and your body cannot be one and the same.

Now, look at this in another way.

If you see a thing out there in this world, you have no doubt that what is 'seen' is different from you, the 'seer'. Let us say you see a tree. The tree is the 'seen.' You are the 'seer.' Can you and the tree be one and the same ? No. Likewise the body is the 'seen.' You are the'seer.'. The 'seen' and the 'seer' are not one! So, you cannot be your body. If you say that you are intertwined with your body, even then it amounts to admitting that you and the body are two different entities.

Suppose there are two dry branches of a tree in a forest. On a very hot summer day due to dry winds, the branches rub against each other and are soon engulfed in fire. We often see this happening in forest fires. Where did the fire come from? You may say that the friction between the two branches produced heat because of which the branches caught fire. But fire and heat are the same. The question is how did the heat arise?

Nothing can come out of a void. If we say that a pot came out of a lump of clay, we must understand that clay has an inherent property within it so that it could be shaped into a pot. Similarly, when fire comes out from the friction of the branches of a tree, we must understand that fire is inherently there in the branches from the beginning and that fire ingrained in the branches comes out with the act of rubbing. That means, the tree branch and fire are completely intermixed. Can we at this stage say that fire and branch are two separate things ? Or should we take them to be one and only one object? Fire has the property to burn. A tree branch has the property to be burnt. Such opposing characters cannot be one. Even though fire exists inseparably mixed with the tree branch, the branch and the fire are not one. In the same way, though you exist intermixed with the body, you and the body are not one.

Thus, it stands established from these three perspectives that you and the body are different entities. Of them, what we refer to as "I" is the sentient entity. It can think, move, and experience joy and sorrow independently on its own. But the body lacks these qualities. Once the 'individual' (*jīva*) departs from the body, it becomes a corpse. So, this body is an inert substance. Can an inert thing be bound by the world ? Can a stone experience joy and sorrow ? So, the bondage from the world cannot be for the body.

The organs of the body carry out all the functions in this world. Are you the organs? You say, "I am seeing, I am hearing." It sounds like you and your eye or you and your ear are one and the same. But, suppose your eye has a problem and you could not see properly. What would you say then? You will say "My eye is not working properly". Just as you said that it was your body, you now say 'this is my eye.' Is it not exactly like saying 'this is my book, this is my house?'. Hence, there is no justification to say you, 'hearing', 'seeing' are one.

There is another point we may consider here. Suppose a bird flies in front of us from this end to the other and comes back here again. And, we sit here and watch its movements. We do not require any other evidence than our observation to tell us that the bird is different from us.

Consider now your eye. The eye works when you are awake and does not work when you sleep. It works when it is healthy and does not work when it becomes unhealthy. If you are asked, 'Who is telling you that it is working or not working?', you will assert, "I know that by myself", It means that you are aware of the functioning or not functioning of the eye, like you are aware of the to and fro movements of the bird in the above example. It should, therefore, be obvious that you and the eye are different in the same way that you and the bird were different. Similarly our ten organs – five of knowledge and five of action are different from you.

It is now clear that "I" is not my organs. Now ask yourself whether the organs are sentient or insentient. When a man dies, the organs do not work even though they stay with the body. Hence, the sentiency of the organs in a living body does not belong to the body. It means that the organs are inert by nature. Inert things cannot be bound by the world. As we said, a stone cannot have bondage.

Next, we shall consider the issue of Mind and its relation to the world.

First of all we must be clear whether the mind is an organ or not. After that we shall examine whether mind and "I" are one and the same or different and whether the world belongs to the mind or not.

Suppose, you go on a stroll and you come across a beautiful landscape. You stand there watching the captivating scene. After a time, a friend of yours from the neighborhood accosts you. You hear him saying to you : "Hello! What's the matter? You are awake and seeing. But you do not respond to my greeting. Why are you not speaking?". You would apologetically tell him, "Please don't misunderstand me. My mind is not here, so I couldn't see you nor could I hear your words". What do we infer from this? You knew that your mind was busy elsewhere and it returned with the clapping and the loud shouting of your friend. It means that you have known the movement of your mind just as you knew the movement of the bird that flew in front of you. It follows, then, that you are different from your mind just as you are different from the bird.

Recall the days when you were very young. When your father was teaching you, you used to say, "Father! Today my mind is a bit dull for some reason. Let us stop with this lesson". But another day you said, "Today my mind is very active. Let's go on with more lessons." That means you were observing your mind and noticing its state. In other words, you come to know the movements of your mind and its attentiveness. It means that you are able to see your mind just as you see a tree over there. So, it is evident that you are different from your mind, just as you are different from the tree.

You may argue that the consciousness of the mind has diffused into various organs of the body enabling them to work. It would imply that you consider the mind to be a conscious and independent entity. If it were so, what happens to the mind when a man dies? Or what happens to your mind when you are in a dreamless deep sleep? The mind does not work then. At that time, it becomes inactive and insentient. If the nature of mind is to be sentient, can it be inert even for a little while? Can the Sun ever be without illumination ? But, because we notice an inert state of the mind, we have to accept that the mind is not a conscious entity and it is an inert substance. It is "You" who are conscious. It is you as Consciousness that is reflected in your mind. Your mind stays conscious so long as the Consciousness is reflected in it. Otherwise, the mind is inert. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that the mind is different from you and it is inert by itself. *saṃsāra* cannot belong to the mind.

Now, we shall consider the issue of '*prāṇa*' (life-force or vital air). A man is alive as long as there is '*prāṇa*' (life-force) in him. I have the knowledge that 'I am' as long as there is '*prāṇa*' in me. If '*prāṇa*' leaves the body, mind and organs associated with it stop working. So, it follows that '*prāṇa*' is the power that makes the body, organs and the mind work. You may at this stage think that you are your '*prāṇa*' and *prāṇa* is conscious. You may even say that the *saṃsāra* is attached to the '*prāṇa*'." So. My son! It may sound quite logical to think " I am '*prāṇa*' ".

Does your '*prāṇa*' work when you are fast asleep? If it does not work, how could the vital functions like breathing, heartbeat, blood circulation etc. take place ? '*prāṇa*' works even when one is asleep. We tentatively concluded previously that this '*prāṇa*' was a conscious entity and that it was consciousness which was flowing through various organs. During your deep sleep, '*prāṇa*' continues to be present. Your body organs continue to exist in your deep sleep. But the *prāṇic* consciousness is not reflected in the organs. When a mirror is placed in sunlight, the sun rays are necessarily reflected by it. In the presence of the king, the guards will not be inattentive. Therefore, it is not possible to say that it is the '*prāṇic* consciousness' which flows into the mind and the organs.

We find that the organs of the body are active and conscious sometimes and inactive and inert at other times. A ball of iron may be hot sometimes and cool at other times. Why so? When the ball of iron is in contact with fire, it is hot and when there is no such contact, it is cool. Similarly, the mind and the organs appear to be conscious when they are in contact with consciousness. When such a contact is absent, they become inert. If we assume '*prāṇa*' to be conscious, many problems arise. We noticed that though the *prāṇa* is present in deep sleep, the organs do not exhibit consciousness during deep sleep.

Hence, we have to agree that consciousness is not related to '*prāṇa*'. Consciousness is independent, self-luminous, very subtle and deep inside everything. '*prāṇa*' works when Consciousness reflects in '*prāṇa*'. The mind functions when Consciousness is reflected in it. When Consciousness flows through the organs, they work.

Hence, it is logical to say that '*prāṇa*' is not a conscious entity by itself. In other words, '*prāṇa*' is inert. It may be difficult to accept this. But, if we keep in our mind the series of steps we have gone through in arriving at this conclusion, we have to admit that '*prāṇa*' is also an insentient thing. Can an insentient object like a stone experience the cycles of birth and death? Obviously not. So the '*saṃsāra* ' does not belong either to the body or to '*prāṇa*', but to that subtlest, independent and the self-luminous Consciousness which activates the *prāṇa* and the body. If there is '*saṃsāra* ', it could be only to Consciousness.

But, what is '*saṃsāra* '? It is the worldly bondage to happiness and sorrow. How are they (happiness and sorrow) caused ? They can be caused only if there is more than one player. One of the players may cause happiness or misery to the other. But we have already seen that there is only one conscious entity. If there is only one conscious entity and no 'thing' else -- *ekameva advitīyam* (chandogyopaniśad VI-ii-1), -- what can cause joy or misery to that One Consciousness?

Let us consider another example. Just as different rooms have different lamps in the same house in a village or each house in a village has its own lighting system, one may propose that there is a possibility for many independent consciousnesses to co-exist. These consciousnesses may have conflicts within them. The consciousness which succeeds will be happy and the vanquished consciousness will be unhappy. In such a case, one may argue that *saṃsāra* belongs to the consciousness only.

On careful examination, this analogy leads to serious ambiguity. If multiple consciousnesses give scope for rivalry between them, does it not amount to saying that they are attached to the mind? If there is no mind, where from the rivalries or bonds of friendship will arise? Similarly, if there is no '*prāṇa*', how can there be worldly transactions ? So, the 'consciousness' proposed in this example has to have a relation to '*prāṇa*' and the mind. A consciousness that is attached to the mind is not anymore pure consciousness. It is contaminated by the mind and not pure consciousness.

On further analysis of the above example, one understands that designating a lamp in each room of a house or a lamp in each house in a village as different lamps signifies each distinct lamp chimney and not a distinct lamp, perse, because the light is the same in all. The chimneys are like a body for the light inside. The light (that is inside the lamp) is the same in all. Depending on the color of the chimney, the color of the light varies. But the light inside has no color at all. Colorless light is pure light. The reference to pure consciousness made earlier, is to a consciousness like the pure light. Just like the same light is revealed through different lamps, one and the same Consciousness is revealed through different minds. This Consciousness does not change or alter. Such a substance which does not change cannot be associated with misery or happiness. Therefore, '*saṃsāra*' does not pertain to 'pure Consciousness'.

The above reasoning leads one to the conclusion that '*saṃsāra*' does not pertain to the body or the organs or the mind or '*prāṇa*' or pure Consciousness.

If *saṃsāra* does not belong to anything and is without any support, the obvious question would be – Does it exist or not ? If a thing exists, it ought to have a substratum. If a thing is seen but does not have any support, one can say that it is unreal and its appearance is merely due to imagination. That means it is an illusion. For example : A traveler walking through a desert may see a mirage, and may think it to be a water body. On what does the appearance of the water body depend ? It is not there in reality, but appears to be there. So we say that it is an illusion. At the first glance we may think that there is water. We may run after the mirage to collect water. After our repeated attempts to reach the water body fails, we examine it more closely. Only after a thorough examination, we understood that the apparent water body in the desert does not have any reality. So, such things which appear to exist but really do not, are called by us as non-existent, illusory and imagined objects. We say that they are produced by *māyā* (magic). We call them mirages.

Oh, My son Shuka! In a similar way, we think that there is a world out there and we run after it. However long we may run after it, we will not know its nature. So we stop running after it and take up a detailed investigation into it. Then we come to know that there is no basis for this '*saṃsāra*'. We know that a thing which appears to be there but lacks support is unreal. Now ask yourself - Is '*saṃsāra*' real or unreal ? One has to accept that '*saṃsāra*' is an illusion and that it is produced only as a result of imagination.

Shuka! Your question to me was, "How this '*saṃsāra*' was born and how it would disappear ?'. Now we know that it is only an imagination and its appearance is illusory. There is no point in asking about its disappearance because a thing that is born out of imagination lacks reality. It never had existence for it to now disappear. When do the mirages disappear? One need not wait till the Sun sets to know that the water has disappeared. An experienced traveler would know that it is devoid of water the very moment he sees a water body and determines that it is a mirage. Similarly, the moment one knows that this '*saṃsāra*' (world) is an illusion, its characteristics ('*saṃsāratva*' – worldliness) disappear(s). Therefore, it is enough if we determine that the world is a nonexistent entity; there is no need to go about destroying it.

Suppose a boy sees a snake in semi-darkness. He screams out of fear, "Snake! Snake!". His father comes along, comforts him patting his back and says reassuringly,"It is not a snake, it is only a rope, see it properly, my boy." The boy stays there with full confidence in his father. He begins to examine carefully and then confirms to himself that it is only a rope. Though it may still appear like a snake from a certain angle, he will not run away from it. Nor will he look for a stick to kill it. He is convinced that the appearance of a snake is just his imagination. There is no more 'snakiness' in that snake. Likewise, it is adequate to inquire into the reality of the world. Once you determine that it lacks a support base after a proper investigation, it will be clear that the '*saṃsāra*' is a product of imagination. No extra steps are needed to dissolve the world nor is there a need to find out when it would disappear.

3. UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURAL APHORISMS

This elaborate step-by-step explanation from Vyasa Maharshi did not have any impact on Sage Shuka, though he heard his father attentively without interrupting him. But he (Shuka) did not show his consent or disagreement. Observing no change in the expression of his son, Sage Vyasa changed tack and continued his teaching taking the scriptures as the base.

Vyasa: My Son! You accept that the Vedas are the best means to absolute knowledge. It has been said in the Vedas, that the performance of '*yajna*-s' (sacrificial rites) will lead to the heavens, and committing sinful acts like robbery will lead one to hell. It means that, if a man performs a '*yajna*' on this earth, he gets the result after he sheds his mortal coil and reaches the other world. For enjoying the results in that world, he will be taking up another gross body in that world. He experiences happiness or misery through that new gross body as per his deeds in the previous life. This is the law. A living being on this earth has a gross body. After shedding it, he travels to the next world in his subtle body. He gets into a new gross body there. On the completion of his life-time there, he sheds that gross body, moves his subtle body back to the earth. He gets into another gross body on the earth to play his role.

Clearly then, we can understand that there is a possessor of the subtle body inside the gross physical body. The individual in the subtle body experiences the world through the gross body that pertains to each world. Thus he cannot escape from the '*saṃsāra*' in whatever world he may be. The real experiencer of the world is the individual who is in the subtle body and not the gross bodies whether of the earth or of the other worlds (the heaven or hell). If the individual in the subtle body is able to experience the world, it means he has the organs, subtle body and mind. That being so, the true Consciousness in them is different from those organs, body, mind and his life-force as we discussed earlier. Let us look at it from another angle.

The wages one gets will always be commensurate with the amount of work done by him. If a man works just for a day, he cannot expect to be paid for his entire life period. Or, suppose a tiller tills a few acres of land, the yield from the land will be proportional to the area tilled and the labor put in. That is the way things happen in this world. Similarly, depending on the type of *yajna* performed, one will be able to live in heaven for a certain period of time but not forever. That is why it is said in the Vedas -

परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यक्रुत क्रुतेन

parīkśya lokān karmacitān brāhmano nirvedamāyānnāstyakruta krutena

ṃundakopaniśat I-ii-12

Meaning: Anywhere in the world, the results are proportional to the work done – thus observed a philosopher.

तद्यथेह कर्मजितो लोकः क्षीयत एवमेवामुत्र पुण्यजितो लोकः क्षीयते

tadyatheha karmajito lokaḥ kṣīyata evamevāmutra puṇyajito lokaḥ kṣīyate

chandogyopaniśat VIII-i-6

Meaning: Any amount of wealth acquired in the world through investing labor will shrink over a period of time. Similarly, whatever may be the amount of merit accrued by performing virtuous deeds, how long one may have enjoyed life in the heaven, one day the accumulated merit will end and so will his comforts in the heaven.

After a study of such *shruti* sentences, the philosopher seeker got very disheartened. He concluded that whatever might be the quantum of good deeds, there was no possibility of attaining eternal peace and permanent liberation**.**

'*shruti*' encourages such people, with the advise -

तरति शोकमात्मवित्
tarati śokamātmavit

chandogyopaniśat VII- i-3

Meaning: If one wants to overcome sorrow and attain liberation from this world, there is a way out. It is simply to know your own Self.

My boy! The Vedas tell us that we have to do only one thing to get over this "*saṃsāra*". It is the attainment of '*ātma jnāna*' or " Knowledge of the Self. There is nothing else to be done. What is the Knowledge of Self ? You have to realize that the Self is Pure Consciousness and it has no attachment to anything including the body. It is that Pure Consciousness only which pervades in all. It is the only truly existing entity in this world. And you are It.

सन्मूलाः सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सदायतनाः सप्रतिष्टाः

sanmūlāḥ somyemāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sadāyatanāḥ sapratiṣṭāḥ
chandogyopaniśat VI-viii-4

Meaning: The entire world comes from the Pure Consciousness. It stays in Pure Consciousness. Finally the world dissolves in Pure Consciousness. And you are that Pure Consciousness.

Thus do we understand from the scriptural authority too that the "*saṃsāra*" does not have true existence. It disappears once the Self-Knowledge has been obtained. So, what you have to do is to reflect on the true nature of your Self. Shed your attachment to the illusory body, mind etc. Nothing more needs to be done."

After listening attentively to this long sermon of Maharshi Vyasa, Shuka simply shrugged it off and expressed his disappointment. Shuka said to his father Vyasa ,

Shuka: "I was expecting you to tell me something new. All this is old stuff."

Maharshi Vyasa was not an ordinary man. He was an embodiment of all fields of knowledge. He was also a highly experienced diplomat. When his son did not react favorably to his preaching, he changed tack and said:

Vyasa: "My Son! You are a great intellectual and also a keen observer. I don't have a good understanding of these philosophical things. My experience is also limited. As far I know there is only one man on this earth who could teach you in depth the experiential knowledge about these matters. He is King Janaka. If you like, you may approach him and find out the answers."

Shuka was very happy at his father's honest admission and the advice given by him. He descended from Mount Meru, assumed a physical form using his yogic power and proceeded immediately to Mithila, the capital city of King Janaka's kingdom.

4. JANAKA'S TEACHING

King Janaka was well known as a great ruler. He was very dear to his people. In addition, he was so highly learned and accomplished in spiritual knowledge that all the men in his service were endowed with the Knowledge of the Self. The citizenry in his country were all as good as great sages. A man like Sage Vyasa would not have sent his son to King Janaka if he (Janaka) were to be any less.

When Shuka reached the Royal palace and sought entry, the guards did not allow him to go in. Shuka was not angry at their refusal. He politely informed them who he was and told them the purpose of his visit. He requested for an audience with the King.

When the guards came to know that their visitor was the son of Maharshi Vyasa, they immediately acted. They requested him to wait there and contacted the king. King Janaka already knew why and what for Shuka was coming to him. The King wanted to make sure that Shuka was fully ready and eligible to be initiated into the Knowledge of Self. In order to test him, he sent back the messengers without giving any reply. Seven days passed but the King did not give the audience to Shuka. Shuka waited patiently. He stood there at the gate for all the seven days. On the eighth day he was admitted into the Royal palace. He was provided with good accommodation to stay with several servants to look after him. They took good care of him and entertained him with song and dance, and served excellent food to him. All the attendants were maidens who looked as delicate and beautiful as nymphs. Shuka did not want any of it. He pleaded with them to end all that royal treatment. But the retinue did not heed his pleas and continued to serve him. Yet he did not show any irritation. He had only one question to anyone meeting him. He wanted to know when he could meet the King. None answered his queries about the King's availability.

Nevertheless, there was no trace of disgust nor annoyance in the mind of Shuka. He was quite indifferent to all the extra care bestowed on him – neither attracted by it nor repelled by it. Seven more days passed thus.

On the fifteenth day at the early hours of dawn, King Janaka himself went straight to Shuka and prostrated at his feet. The King was completely convinced and fully satisfied about Shukas's eligibility to receive Self-Knowledge. After a quick exchange of pleasantries, King Janaka addressed him thus:

Janaka: "Oh Maharshi Shuka! You have already achieved the Bliss that could be finally attained. I can see it on your face. Why did you come this far? What do you like to know?"

Maharshi Shuka remembered that he posed eight questions to his father. His father Maharshi Vyasa considered that only two of those questions were important. He declared the others as unnecessary. Further, Vyasa's response was based entirely on logic. Therefore, Maharshi Shuka asked King Janaka only two questions.

Shuka: "Revered King Janaka! How did this world, which is so glamorous and dazzling, originate? How will it come to an end? Kindly clarify and enlighten me." King Janaka gave in reply an eloquent speech for a couple of hours. Shuka was unimpressed.

The King noticed Shuka's dissatisfaction. So he spoke for 2-3 hours more. Still Shuka looked questioningly at the King. The King then asked him as to what exactly was bothering Shuka. Shuka then opened his mind.

Shuka: "Oh King! My respects to you. You hardly said anything new. I learnt all this stuff as a boy when I was studying the scriptures. My observations taught me the same things when I went on a tour of the three worlds later on. When I asked my father the questions, he responded in the same way. Now you also teach me the same thing. Ah, yes, there may be a slight difference in styles, or the words. But there is no difference in substance. There was nothing that I already did not know.

It looks to me that the world appears to be glamorous and fascinating because of the tendentious mind. The mind is full of desires and it craves for action spurred by the '*vAasana*-s' (tendencies accrued as a result of the actions performed in the past). When the mind is eliminated totally, the entire world ends. There is no substance in this world. This is my firm conviction. Am I correct or not? If you validate and confirm what I said, I will end my mind with my will power. Then I shall always be at peace. Kindly tell me decisively without any room for doubt."

King Janaka's delight knew no bounds on hearing the words of Shuka. He said :

Janaka:

स्वसंकल्पवशाद्बद्धो निःसंकल्पश्च मुच्यते ।।

svasaṃkalpavaśādbaddho niḥsaṃkalpaśca mucyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 1, Sloka 36

Meaning: A man is bound due to his thoughts. He is liberated when free from his thoughts,

King Janaka commended Shuka. He assured him that there was nothing more to be learnt or known. Nor was there anything else to be accomplished. He told Shuka: "You have captured the essence of all the teaching. There is nothing more to be added. You have achieved the ultimate understanding. Having understood it, you abjured all worldly comforts. You are neither attracted nor repelled by this visible world. You will not fall prey to this worldly enticement. So you are liberated. There is no doubt about that."

Even as the King was speaking, Maharishi Shuka silenced his mind and went into deep *samādhi*. In that state of *samādhi*, all his doubts were resolved. After a time, Maharishi Shuka took leave from King Janaka and returned to Mount Meru. He remained there in deep meditation (*nirvikalpa samādhi*) without a break for ten thousand years."

5. SAGE VISWAMITRA'S TEACHING

Concluding the story of Maharshi Shuka, Sage Viswamitra turned to Rama and spoke the following words:

Viswamitra: "Oh Sri Rama! What I am going to teach you now will only be as effective as King Janaka's teaching to Maharshi Shuka, who understood all the things on the strength of his Self-inquiry. The traces of impurities still present in his mind worked against his full realization by popping up as doubt and uncertainty. King Janaka could help him to cleanse his mind like wiping a little dust off the mirror. Sri Rama! You are also in the same position. You will undoubtedly attain eternal peace with our preaching."

Maharshi Vyasa was also present in the Royal Court of Dasaratha at the time Sage Viswamitra narrated the story of his son, Sage Shuka. Vishwamitra turned to Maharshi Vyasa and the other sages in the congregation and said in praise of Sri Rama as follows:

Viswamitra: "Maharshi Vyasa and fellow saints! Sri Rama like Shuka has no taste for the comforts and luxuries of life. Detachment towards worldly pleasures is a very good 'marker' to indicate whether one has the potential to grasp Self-Knowledge or not. Sri Rama has achieved complete detachment and proved worthy of receiving the highest knowledge."

Addressing Sri Rama again, Mahaishi Viswamitra said: "Rama! Bondage and Liberation are not totally unknown things.

वासनातानवं राम मोक्ष इत्युच्यते बुधैः ।
पदार्थवासनादार्ढ्यं बन्ध इत्यभिधीयते ।।

vāsanātānavaṃ rāma mokṣa ityucyate budhaiḥ |
padārthavāsanādārḍhyaṃ bandha ityabhidhīyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 2, Sloka 5

Rama ! Bondage results from intensification of the desires in the mind. It is Liberation when the desires are dissolved.

With increasing attachment to the comforts of life, one gets more tightly bound to the world. If the grip of the desires loosens, one gets free from the world and moves nearer to liberation.

Knowledge of the Self (*tatva jnāna*) may either be merely intellectual or really experiential. Many persons hailing from religiously inclined families would have had a nodding acquaintance with the subject matter. They would have absorbed the basics because of the influence of the background they are in. They can talk about it; they can deliver lectures on it. But they themselves will hardly give up their desires. They do not grow detached from worldly involvement. When one attains Self-Knowledge through the route of dispassion and detachment, only then it is the real Self-Knowledge.

What does it mean to obtain Self-Knowledge through dispassion ? Does it amount to wearing ochre robes ? Or growing a beard and shaving off the head ? None of it ! There are, principally, four indicators for it. They are:

1. Even under compulsion, he will not be enticed by or succumb to the worldly attractions.
2. He will have no inclination to possess anything. Nor will he have any interest in accruing merit or in enjoying the fruits of his meritorious actions.
3. He does not look for appreciation, admiration and praise from others.
4. He will have absolutely no interest in fame or positions.

The above criteria are the touchstones for assessing the detachment of a seeker. Maharshi Viswamitra said that there was an additional test which circumscribes the above. According to the Maharshi one should naturally and effortlessly obtain those qualities. If one were to acquire them through practice because he happened to hear that those are some essential requisites to be fulfilled in order to secure liberation under the expectation that he will be assured of a blissful life afterwards, that will not be true detachment. The natural detachment is that which arises out of clearly knowing the futility of pursuing material gains and comforts. Cultivation of detachment wishing for liberation motivated by the desire to excel over others or by the anticipation of a comfortable life post-liberation does not amount to true detachment.

Suppose a person sees a silver nugget at a distance on the seashore. He runs for it. When he goes there, he discovers that it is only an oyster shell and not silver. Then again at another point he sees another drop of silver. Again he runs for it but finds that it is only the nacre. After gaining experience thus, he understands without any doubt that the silvery appearances were not really silver nuggets, but only a reflection of the sun rays from the shells making them look like lumps of silver. After getting this real experiential knowledge, is it necessary for him to practice 'detachment' if he happens to see silver drops again ? No. He has already developed a natural detachment within him towards the silver drops. Similarly, when one is detached naturally from the worldly comforts and luxuries out of the knowledge that they are illusions, only then it is true detachment.

Maharshi Viswamitra once again addressed the saints: "Oh Great Men! If there is salinity in the soil, no plant can grow. Even if a plant grows, it will not survive long. Even if it survives, it will have only stunted growth. If plants are not growing well in a particular soil, one can infer that there is salinity in that soil. In the same way, once the salinity of '*tatvajnāna*' (Self-Knowledge) enters a person's mind, desire for experiencing things will not grow or survive there. We see this happening in Sri Rama. So we have to understand that the seed of '*tatva jnāna*' has taken root in his mind.

Because of his discriminative knowledge, Rama is asking for liberation. He does not have interest in anything else. But, there is still a little 'dirt' in the form of a doubt hovering in his mind. That has to be completely wiped out, if Sri Rama has to attain liberation. For that he needs a few tools based on strong logic. Maharshi Vasishta is the only man who can equip him with necessary skills. Maharshi Vasishta has been the Royal Guru for several generations of the Raghu dynasty. He is omniscient, a polymath. So he has to instruct Rama."

Viswamitra turned to Vasishta and said, " Maharshi Vasishta! You may recall that we had had strong differences once! In order to resolve the issues between us, Lord Brahma arranged a congregation of saints on the Nishadha Mountain. He instructed both of us on the 'Knowledge of Self'. That Knowledge eradicates all the *vāsana*-s pertaining to the world. Please impart that Knowledge to Sri Rama. Please take Sri Rama as your disciple. Instruction from detached men like you will be decidedly fruitful. Teaching a highly eligible disciple like Rama will be rewarding. So, Maharshi! Please initiate Sri Rama."

Sage Viswamitra who began saying that he would himself initiate Rama suddenly changed his stand and entrusted the task to Maharshi Vasishta. This gesture of Viswamitra drew applause and appreciation from all the saints.

Though Viswamitra was much experienced in philosophical matters, he had never been a teacher. He could not convey in a well-planned manner what he wanted to teach. The saints gathered in the congregation understood so. Sage Viswamitra too was aware of that fact. Moreover, he knew how capable Maharishi Vasishta was, as a teacher. For, when he was a king in his former *āśrama* (stage of life), he was himself a disciple of Maharsahi Vasishta, the son of Brahma. Therefore, Sage Viswamitra whole-heartedly appealed to Maharshi Vasishta to take up the instruction for Rama.

Vasishta: "Yes, Maharishi Vasishta ! I will follow your command. One can hardly afford to disregard the words of elders like you.".

Sage Viswamitra, though a renunciate with a staff and a'gourd'(water container) in his hand now, was once an emperor. Maharshi Vasishta was his minister at that time and was accustomed to obey the emperor's orders. A slight tone of command was also present in the way Sage Viswamitra asked Sage Vasishta, reminiscent of the old habit. MaharshiVasishta too accepted the command with humility as was his wont and commenced his teaching.

6. VASISHTA'S DISCOURSES

Maharshi Vasishta, by himself, understood Sri Rama's state of detachment. As a responsible teacher, he identified where Rama was wrong in his thought process. He, accordingly, thought of a plan as to what was to be taught and how to proceed in his teaching. In spite of all his wisdom and detachment, Sri Rama slipped over some subtle in-depth pointers mentioned in the *śāstra*-s. As a result, he sometimes found fault with the *śāstra*-s. He was not able to organize his thoughts in an orderly manner. So Maharshi Vasishta decided to begin his teaching with the way a seeker should organize his thinking process, how he should conduct himself and what methods of spiritual practice (*sādhana*) he should pursue. With this plan Maharshi Vasishta started his preaching.

Vasishta: "Sri Rama! My father Lord Brahma revealed to me, at the beginning of the creation, the Supreme Knowledge that is said to bestow absolute peace to all the beings of the forthcoming creation. I am now offering you that knowledge."

Though Maharshi Vishswamitra asked Maharshi Vasishta to teach Sri Rama the knowledge which they received from Lord Brahma on the Mount Nishada, Maharishi Vasishta started the teaching with what he learnt from Lord Brahma at the very beginning of creation. From this Sri Rama could infer that Maharshi Vasishta's sermon would go a long way and would take considerable time. So he intervened with a request to Maharshi Vasishta to clarify a doubt before proceeding further.

Sri Rama: ' Revered Sir ! Maharshi Shuka, the son of Maharshi Vyasa was said to have achieved liberation whereas his father and teacher Vyasa had not been liberated by that time. Maharshi Vyasa was also known for his omniscience. Why did the father not attain liberation, though his son and disciple Shuka got liberated ?'.

Maharshi Vasishta, thought for a while over Rama's question. For, he wanted that his response to the question should be integrated well with the overall scheme of teaching he had already laid out in his mind. Secondly, and more importantly, if he were to provide a satisfactory reply to Rama, he had to explain to him about what was meant by liberation and what was meant by creation. In addition, he had also to tell about the difference between liberation while having the body (*jīvanmukti*) and the liberation after leaving the body (*videhamukti*). After pondering over the matter, Maharshi Vasishta started his discourse thus:

Vasishta: "Rama! Whether you call it The Supreme Self, Consciousness or Effulgence, it is one and the same. So, the Supreme Self is also referred to as Consciousness-Effulgence (*citprakAsha*). We cannot count the number of zillions of *brahmāṇḍa*-s (Universes/multiverses) that dissolved into It so far. At present an unknown number of *brahmāṇḍa*-s are alive in It. No one can say how many more *brahmāṇḍa*--s in future, will originate, sustain and dissolve back into It like the waves rising and falling back into the sea."

Rama once again interrupted the Sage's discourse at this stage, to question him.

Sri Rama: "Revered Master! The *brahmāṇḍa*-sin the present period are bound by limits on either side. On one side are the past *brahmāṇḍa*-s and on the other side are the future *brahmāṇḍa*-s. You say that the *brahmāṇḍa*-s of the present are infinite in number. But it could be decisively said that their number will be less than those of the past and also of the future. It is so because the brahmāṇḍa-s of the past or future do not have any limiting boundary on their other side. When you say that the number of the *brahmāṇḍa*-s at the present time bound by limits on both sides is infinite, what can one say about the rest ?"

7. THREE SPACES

Maharshi Vasishta was very pleased with Rama's question. In reply, he said, "Rama! Where do the *brahmāṇḍa*-s (multiverses) of the present time exist? They are in space. What is space exactly?

One definition for space is that because of which it is possible for two objects to exist separate from one another. We can also define it in another way. Space is that in which all the known objects are located. But your dream world is also known to you! Can you say where the rivers, mountains and all the other things of your dream world are located in the world space of the wakeful state?

If we draw a graph, we can define the position of an object in the three-dimensional space. Can you point out where the mountains, rivers, houses etc. of your dream world are located in the wakeful space? We cannot, because they are not there in wakeful space. But you have seen them. Where were they when you saw them? You would say that the dream world objects were born in the mind, existed in the mind and finally dissolved into the mind. We agree with that. Let us not for now worry about their birth or dissolution. Let us just find out where they exist. You say they were in the mind. That means, all the rivers, mountains, clouds, sky, stars etc. which you have seen in your dream exist in your mind. In other words, your mind has provided the place for so many varieties of things to exist. We have observed according to one definition that the space is that which gives place to the objects to exist. According to that definition then, your mind is also a space! So the mind can be called as mind-space (*mānasākāśa*).

You have seen one space in your dream and that is not this outer space. It is a different space. The space you have seen in your dream is a part of your mind-space. Please make a note of that.

If you observe carefully, you will find that not only the dream world but also the world in the wakeful state exists because of your mind. When your mind is present, you have this world for you. When you don't have your mind (as in deep sleep), you don't have this world. So, as a matter of fact this awake state world is also in your mind. Thus, what you call 'space' in this wakeful state world is also embedded in your mind.

8. WHAT IS SUBTLETY?

Space is the subtlest of all the things in this world. What is 'subtlety'? The number of senses with which we can detect an object defines how coarse or subtle it is. An object which can be sensed by more sense organs is grosser than that which can be sensed by fewer sensory organs. For example, take a piece of rock. You can see the rock piece with your eye and identify it. You can touch it with the hand and identify it. You can smell and identify it. You can put it on the tongue and taste it to identify. If there are two pieces of that rock, you can identify it from the sound that comes when one piece is struck against the other.

So, you can identify a rock with all the five senses-- eye, nose, ear, skin and tongue. If you take air, you cannot identify it with your eye or with your nose or with your tongue. But if the air passes over your skin the sense of touch can identify air. By hearing the sound when a breeze blows, you can identify air. It means air can be identified with only two sense organs– skin and ears whereas a rock can be identified by all the five sense organs. So, air is subtler than a piece of rock.

9. SPACE IS MATTER

How to recognize space? Space is cognized only by indirect means. One way is through the sound that emanates when one thing strikes against another. When sound is heard, one can say that there were two different things, once separated from each other, but now are crashing against each other. Whenever friction is noticed between two things anywhere in the world, we may infer that they ought to have been separate from one another and have come closer later. 'Separated' means that there was space in between them. So, if sound is produced, there must have been space earlier between the two objects.

In other words, for sound to emerge, it is necessary that space must pre-exist between two things. That's why the elders declared that sound is a quality of space. When we detect a sound with the aid of the ear, we automatically imagine the existence of space.

We do not see anything to be present between the roof of the house and us on the floor. We infer space to be present in-between. Therefore, space is said to be "invisible." It means that space is not graspable directly by any of the five sensory organs. Hence, space is the subtlest of the five fundamental elements (*panca bhūta-s*).

10. PERVASIVENESS

The subtler the object, the more pervasive it will be in nature. Air pervades the earth because air is subtler than the earth. Since space is the subtlest of all the things, it surrounds and pervades all other things in this world.

Coming back to the object called mind, where do you think the mind is located within space? Do you think it is in the head? If it is confined within the head, how can it detect the things in the distant stars and galaxies which are millions of miles away? Though it appears to leave its footprint on the piece of meat in our skull, which we call the brain, we have to admit that the mind is much bigger than the brain. We had concluded a while ago that the entire creation comprising space along with the whole cosmic world is embedded within such a mind.

We have also established that whatever pervades the most is the subtlest and that what is pervaded is relatively grosser. When we combine both these conclusions, we can say that the mind-space is subtler than even the 'invisible' cosmic space.

The take home message from the above discussion is that:

i) All the objects present in this creation are located in the space out there.
ii) The space out there along with all the objects is located in the mind-space.
iii) Mind-space means the space called 'mind.'

11. CONSCIOUSNESS-SPACE

We cognise the mind. Sometimes it is present and at other times it is not. That means, we cognise its movements. Though the mind is insentient, it behaves like a sentient one. How ? Because the self-effulgent Consciousness is supporting the mind. When that illumination is reflected in the mind, it acts as a conscious entity. When a veil of ignorance comes between the mind and Consciousness, Consciousness does not reflect in the mind. The mind then becomes inert. So, we can say that Consciousness surrounds and pervades the mind. Which pervades is subtler than that which is pervaded. From that perspective, Consciousness is subtler than the mind or mind-space (*mānasākāśa*). Since mind-space is pervaded by Consciousness, we can say that Consciousness also is space-like. From this point of view, Absolute Consciousness can be given a new name –'Consciousness-Space' (*cidākāśa*).

12. THE KINGDOM OF THE MIND

Rama! So far we have dealt with three spaces, (1) the *cidākāśa* or Consciousness- Space. (2) *mānasākāśa* or mind-space which is contained in *cidākāśa* and (3) the *bahirākāśa* (space out there) which is contained in *mānasākāśa*. All the *Brahmāṇḍa*-s (multiverses/galaxies) are there in Outer Space.

Please pay attention to what I am going to say. Suppose a person died in this world. Earlier you said, "In this world there is neither birth nor death, but seen and unseen are there." . From one angle what you said is true. But people in this world use the word 'death.' What happens when a person dies? At the time of death his sense organs merge in his mind. The mind merges in '*prāṇa*' (life force), the *prāṇa* merges in the principle of light (*tejas*) and this in turn merges in space. The space merges into Consciousness. If the reminiscences from one's past birth remain at the time of the merger, he will take another birth.

But if he possesses the Knowledge of the Self (that I am the Supreme Self) at the time of death, he will not take another birth. What would be the position of one who has the reminiscences of the past birth in his *mānasākāśa* and goes into the absolute Consciousness? Since he has reached the *cidākāśa* after crossing the outer space and the *mānasākāśa* , he will be able to see the three spaces and the three worlds at a time in that moment, (because the three worlds, outer space, mind-space and Consciousness-Space are embedded in subtler space).

Eventually, he returns taking birth again under the influence of the *vāsana*-s in the mind (i.e. the reminiscences of past birth). When he takes birth assuming a body, he takes not only that body but also the world surrounding it. The long and short of it is that every person is born into a world as per the *vāsana*-s carried in the mind. To put it in another way, his present world is the creation of his past mind. Hence, our elders called this world "*manorājyam*" (Kingdom of the Mind).

13. BIRTH OF INDIVIDUALS

We said a while ago that a person reaches *cidākāśa* after his death before he assumes another body. We also said that at that moment he notices the three spaces and the three worlds. However, an important point has to be noted here. Because of his attachment to certain parts of the world, his ignorance fortifies and he sees only that part in the gross physical form. For example, as a result of his past *vāsana*-s, if he has more love for the earth, then the earth will be visible to him in a physical form and he will take birth as a being on the earth. Another person with greater love for heaven will take birth there, as heaven appears in gross form to him.

The attachments of the individual beings keep changing depending on their *samskāra*-s (*vāsana*-s). So, they keep moving between the higher and the lower worlds. There is no end to these up and down movements. They are counted in terms of *kalpa*-s, *yuga*-s, *mahayuga-s* by our elders. They are like the rising and falling waves in a sea. There may be some subtle differences. Similarly, the lives of individual beings may sometimes bear resemblance in different *kalpa*-s in the creation and no resemblance at other times..

14. BIRTH SEQUENCE OF VYASAS

Rama! As far as I can remember, this Vyasa who is sitting in the midst of us is the 32nd Vyasa in the continuous stream of creation. I say this based on his knowledge of *śāstra*-s. He authored the Mahabharata, Brahmasutras etc. The 32 Vyasas, who took birth so far, have been similar in form, position, caste and the deeds done by them. But as far as their knowledge is concerned,12 of them have a higher position. Out of the remaining 20, 10 took birth in another lineage. Not only Vyasa, but Valmiki, Bhrigu, Angirasa and many others also are born and dead in every *kalpa*. There are some similarities and dissimilarities among them also.

A *kalpa* is a day in the life of Brahma, the creator. *yuga*-s repeat within it (much like the same seven days repeat in a month). *tretAyuga* repeats 72 times. Of them, some have already passed. Now we are in a *tretAyuga and* some more are going to come. Each *tretāyuga* runs more or less in a similar way. Let us take up an example for a better appreciation of this.

15. WHAT IS A *KALPA*?

We are all living beings. So consider your own case. Each day is alike.The Sun rises in the morning. At noon, one becomes hungry. By evening the Sun sets. By night, sleep overtakes. It is the same routine everyday. We met the same person that we met yesterday. We do the same job that we did yesterday. Thus there is a repetition of activities every day.

In spite of that, we cannot say that there is no difference at all between one day and the other in our life? Till yesterday, you were in depressing thoughts. Today Maharshi Viswamitra has come and has been able to persuade you to speak up. Is there no difference between today and yesterday ? So, we see plenty of similarities between yesterday and today, but there are some differences also. This is what we observe in our lives.

In the same way, every day passes in the same way with some minor differences in the life of the Brahma also. A day of Brahma is called '*kalpa*'. Creation takes place more or less similarly in every *kalpa*, so the elders and the *shAstra-s* tell us. Not only this Vyasa, I and even you also have led our lives with these very names several times. I am aware of all these details.

The same person who took birth as Vyasa in this *kalpa* is likely to take birth in the next *kalpa* as the same Vyasa. Births recur again and again as a result of our past deeds. In fact, the Vyasa sitting in this conference has taken birth ten times as Vyasa. He will take eight more births as Vyasa and each time he will author the Mahabharata. Every time he will analyze the Vedas. After that, he will obtain the position of the Four-faced Brahma (Creator). After the completion of his life of Brahmas, he will attain liberation without body (*videha mukti*). Not only Vyasa, even myself, Valmiki, Bhrigu, and several other Maharshis were born several times earlier with different names. We are going to take birth many times over.

16. LIBERATION WITH THE BODY

All these births are the effect of our past deeds. Whether it is Vyasa or myself, our life is that of a liberated man with a body (*jīvanmukta*). We have attained absolute Knowledge of the Supreme Self. So, we are not enticed by this world. Nor do we have any fear and sorrow that arise from the bondage to the world. We do not possess the thoughts of 'me' and 'mine.' Once you know that there is no water in a mirage in the desert, the mirage waters cannot tempt you though are seen by you. We may perceive things with our senses, but they do not affect us in any way. That is the life of a '*jīvanmukta*' (a man liberated in this life).

Rama! Now we are completely absorbed in Self and the veil of ignorance has dissolved. We observed certain severe Yogic practices before. We achieved certain positions of authority and status as a result of those practices. They can't be discarded now. Nor is there a need to get rid of them. Let me illustrate through an example.

You are an expert archer. If you shoot an arrow aiming at a bird perched on the top branch of a tree and hit the target, will the arrow stop just there ? No. It will go further carrying the bird and will stop only after the momentum is totally exhausted.

Suppose you give an instruction to the arrow that it should stop the moment it hits the bird because your purpose was to hit the bird. The arrow can neither understand your instruction nor stop immediately after hitting the bird because the arrow is an inert thing. No inert thing can act on its own or stop acting on its own.

In fact, an inert thing will always stay inactive. Only if consciousness from a conscious being enters into the inert thing, it will become active. It stays active as long as consciousness remains with it. That is the characteristic of an inanimate object.

(Note: The principles of dynamics in Physics are called 'Newton's laws of motion.' The first law states that if an object is in motion, it continues to be in motion. If it remains at rest, it continues to be at rest. For its condition to change, an external force has to act on it. It means that only an external force acting on it can stop a moving object. If an object at rest has to be moved, again an external force has to act on it.

What Sage Vasishta says is more or less the same thing. The Laws of Newton pertain to the objects of the world. So Newton has not used terms like 'conscious' and 'inert'. He used words like matter and force. Since Maharshi Vasishta is dealing with the Knowledge of the Self, he used the words 'inert' and 'conscious.' Except for the terminology, there is no difference in the concept.)

Coming back to the subject Maharshi Vasishta was explaining: The Sage gave the example of an arrow. Since the arrow shot was inert, it continued to move forward even after hitting the bird. It moved until the 'consciousness' in it ceased. But he didn't say how and with what that quality ended. In the present context, Maharshi Vasishta was not concerned with those details.

"Rama! Just as the arrow is an inert matter, the actions done (karma) and the resultant bodies (*śarīra*-s) are also inert entities. There is a conscious entity that activates them. In the case of the persons like Vyasa, who are now liberated men, the intense practice of yoga in their earlier births helped them in attaining Self-Knowledge. Vyasa obtained the desired Self- Knowledge already in one of the earlier lives and that knowledge continues to be with him in later lives. The situation is similar to the arrow hitting the bird. It can't just stop at the point of piercing the neck of the bird. As we said earlier, it will go further carrying the bird to some distance along with itself.

17. EX-OFFICIO AUTHORITY

Though one attains Self-Knowledge by Yogic practices, he is subjected to rebirths. An individual who possesses a physical body even after attaining Self-Knowledge is called a *jīvanmukta* (liberated with the body). If there happens to be a need for an individual to be reborn with a gross body even after he becomes a *jīvanmukta,* such a noble individual is utilized to discharge certain major responsible functions within the overall creation work of Brahma, the Creator. The bodies assumed by such persons are called 'ex officio bodies' (*ādhikārika śarīra*-s) and those who possess them as'Ex officio Authority' (*ādhikārika puruṣa*-s). As I said earlier, this Vyasa who is here has to write the Mahabharata eight more times. Thereafter, he has to take over as the '*caturmukha brahma*' (The Four-faced Creator.)

The deeds performed by these great men go a long way in the service of trillions of people. Because this Vyasa is destined to assume (wear) the 'ex officio bodies,' he is unable to get into deep meditation or obtain *videhamukti* shedding his body. It is so because the creation also needs such 'Ex officio Authorities.'. These *jīvanmukta* -s may be possessing bodies, and may involve themselves in carrying out many jobs in order to expend the effects of their past yogic practices; but we should not be under the illusion that they are ignoramuses. They are men of Absolute Wisdom.

Coming to the case of Shuka, I have to say that there is no need for him to possess an 'ex officio body.' There are no effects of the past deeds which he has to still experience. Therefore, immediately after attaining purity of mind and Self-Knowledge under the guidance of King Janaka, he reached Mount Meru and spent the balance of his life in '*nirvikalpa samadh*i' (Deep Mediation). Thereafter he obtained '*videha mukti*' (liberation without body). Because of that, he was Self-realized sooner than his father. But as far as the attainment of Self-Knowledge is concerned, there is no difference between Vyasa and Shuka.

18. ATTAINMENT OF LIBERATION

Sri Rama! I have cleared your doubt about the state of liberation of Vyasa and Shuka. Let me answer a doubt which may arise in your mind in this context.

The doubt could be - if every being obtains liberation, sooner or later, someday all of the beings would be liberated. It means that in the course of several *kalpa*-s not even a single being would be left unliberated. If all the beings got the liberation, it amounts to the total disappearance of *māyā* (illusion). Thereafter there would be no more births. It is certain to happen that way sometime or the other. As the process is inevitable, why should anyone strive for liberation ? Leave alone liberation, why strive to accrue even '*puṇya*' (merit) ?

It may appear that such a situation may arise from the way I described the process of *jīvanmukti*. But such a thing will not take place. Why ? Because, in this creation, there are infinite beings. Some of them may become jīvanmukta-s or *videhamukta*-s. There would still remain a large number of people who are not liberated. Some of the people may be waiting for a proper time to be reborn. They will be in a dormant state until the conditions are conducive for experiencing the results of their deeds. I shall explain their condition to you with an illustration.

Let's say there is a heap of grain. A servant is engaged to measure it with a measuring jar. He begins to measure the grain by filling the jar and pouring the contents into a new heap. In that process the grains at the top of the jar go down and the grains at the bottom fall on the top. Soon a new layer of grains covers the ones at the top when the next jar is emptied on the heap. Thus the grains which were on the top of the first heap go to the bottom of the second heap.

His supervisor comes along and orders re-measurement. Every time the measurement is carried out, the relative position of the grains goes up and down in the heap. Likewise, the birth of the beings moves up and down.

The position of heaven and hell also moves accordingly. As there are an infinite number of beings, this process also continues indefinitely. Hence I do not see the possibility of *māyā* disappearing totally on its own. Because of this reason, elders say that illusion would never end by itself. Illusion, however, disappears for one who strives for its dissolution. Only that individual achieves salvation (liberation). *māyā* does not end for the others. So Rama! Every human being has to work for his liberation with an effort at his individual level."

(Note: We have already observed that Maharshi Vasishta, being a skillful teacher, had drawn a plan of what he hoped to teach. Though Rama interrupted him with a few questions, the Sage did not deviate from his plan. He could seamlessly weave his replies to Rama's questions within his scheme of teaching. He asserted that each human being without exception should pursue liberation with self effort. This human endeavor is the first topic in the curriculum that the Maharshi had planned to discuss. If this is to be understood well, we have to first know the scheme of the teaching formulated by the Maharshi in this Chapter on The Conduct and Behavior of a Determined Seeker. Otherwise, it may look quite confusing to follow the text. Therefore, let us familiarize ourselves with his scheme of imparting spiritual knowledge.)

19. SAGE VASISHTA'S PLAN OF TEACHING

Maharshi Vasishta placed human effort at the top in his plan of preaching. He devoted six *sarga*-s to this topic. He did not accept the principle of complacency that one could leave things to one's destiny. Some of the people inclined towards devotion or detachment generally tend to be indolent. Maharshi Vasishta establishes in these six chapters that a seeker desirous of liberation cannot at all afford to be lethargic or lazy. The Sage exhorts the seeker to be ever vigilant in the pursuit of Self- Knowledge and diligently conduct the Self inquiry. This is the second important aspect. But Maharshi Vasishta only cursorily expounds this issue at this stage. There is a very important reason for that.

These days we come across many educated persons who read the philosophical works of Dr. S. Radhakrishanan, Chinmayananda, Vivekananda, Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swami and many other philosophers and saints. But they lead a very miserly and selfish life. They do not share even a morsel of food with anybody in charity. One wonders at their attitude of self-interest and inability to absorb even a little of Vedanta in spite of their voracious study of philosophical books. Reading books is not important for the assimilation of philosophy. According to Maharshi Vasishta, the most important step for a sincere seeker is to acquire four qualifications. The four qualifications are:

- *śama* (Tranquility)
- *ātmavicara* (Self-inquiry)
- *santoṣa* (Equanimity)
- *satsangha* (Association with Good people)

These four aspects are briefly discussed here by Maharshi Vasishta.

'*śama*' is that quality which is conducive to calmness or tranquility. *santoṣa* (Equanimity) refers to an attitude of cheerful acceptance of the sorrows and joys as they arise in one's life as a result of the past deeds. One should not want to avoid difficult times nor should he wish for recurrence of happy times in his life. '*satsangha*' refers to keeping the company of noble and virtuous people**.** We may note that Maharshi Vasishta positioned Self-inquiry at the second stage, after tranquility.

During Self-inquiry, we will have to meticulously analyze and assess the available evidence before arriving at any conclusion. For that, we should know what constitutes acceptable evidence. Maharshi Vasishta placed this aspect at third position in his plan.

Maharshi Vasishta also indicated the benefits that would accrue if one pursues a systematic and well-designed program of study.

देहात्म ज्ञानवत ज्ञानं देहात्म ज्ञान बाधकं
आत्मन्येव भवेद्यस्य स नेछन्नापि मुच्यते

dehātma jñānavata jñānaṃ dehātma jñāna bādhakaṃ
ātmanyeva bhavedyasya sa nechannāpi mucyate

(a verse cited in the commentary following the verse 15, sarga 20,Ch.2)

Every man believes very strongly "I am my body." If the Self-inquiry is carried out adopting the three-stage approach as prescribed by Maharshi Vasishta, he gets rid of the thought 'I am my body.' He will realize that "I am *Brahman*." This conviction will be as strong as his earlier belief that he was his body. Then, he will be liberated even if he doesn't look for it.

With this plan in mind Maharshi Vasishta gave his sermon to Sri Rama. We shall now proceed step by step to study Maharshi Vasishta's teaching to Rama regarding conduct and the behavior of an aspirant for liberation. At this point, Sage Valmiki informs us, through the words of Maharshi Vasishta, the number of the cantos and verses to be expected in this work.

20. HUMAN EFFORT

As mentioned earlier, Maharshi Vasishta accords much importance to human effort. Accordingly he began his discourse with this topic.

"Rama! Suppose you heard that a person had grown a beautiful garden and raised many orchids with colorful flowers. You wanted to see the garden and went over there. But you went there at midnight on a New Moon day. Would you be able to see the beauty of the garden? If you wish to see the colors of the flowers, you should go during the daytime. What is the use of going at night?

It is also useless to merely sit at home and to think about the beautiful flowers in the garden. If anyone in this world desires to get a thing, he has to make adequate effort to obtain it. The effort should be proper for the occasion. If an effort is made like going to the garden in the night, it is called an improper effort. Investing in a systematic effort will yield results. On the other hand, if an unsystematic or improper approach is made, it will be a wasted labor without any results. If no effort is made, there will obviously be no result at all. The principle holds equally well in spiritual matters also. There is no exception to this rule. This is how things work in this world.

21. DESTINY IS ACTION

Some people believe that everything in this world proceeds according to the divine will. They hold that we are at the mercy of our fate and all human beings are mere puppets in the hands of destiny. What they mean is that however much we make an effort, it would be of no use. They think that a megalomaniac called Divine force sits up above in the skies and dumps on us all sorts of joys and sorrows depending on his whims and fancies. If you observe carefully, we notice a certain pattern of reaction in them to the events in their life. When an unexpected calamity arises, he will be helplessly complaining, "I thought my son would become very rich and that he would take care of me, but due to my fate, it happened otherwise."

Do the words like karma, God, and destiny mean the same? When he refers to his fate, what does he mean? He meant the result of the actions performed by him in a former birth. Suppose he holds for fun, or for proving himself to be unique, a piece of burning ember with bare hands. It will burn his hands. He will not call that to be his fate. If he sees directly the result of an action, he doesn't call it to be his fate. When his hunger is satiated after a meal, he doesn't call it his fate. He applies the words 'Fate' and '*Karma*' only to the results that he cannot connect to his preceding actions.

So anyone talking of fate, God or destiny is actually referring to his own past actions. What he does at present is called 'Action.' Similarly actions done in a previous birth also should be called 'Action.' But this may cause a bit of confusion. So he called the effect of the actions done in an unknown past as 'Destiny.' Forgetting that 'fate' is just a name given, he imagines that a big bully called Fate sits above and dictates the show.

22. TYPES OF HUMAN EFFORT

Thus what we have is 'action" only – the actions done in the present life and the actions done in the past life. Beyond this, there is nothing like a destiny at all. It is only a name. You get the desired results through your own actions. This principle cannot be violated. The action done by you is the effort you put in. It is called Human Effort (*puruṣa prayatna*). Other names are: *puruṣakāra, puruṣārtha, pauruśa*. The word *pauruśa* has acquired a new meaning as 'manliness.' But its etymological meaning is human effort which is of two types:

1. Disorganized Human Effort and 2. Organized Human Effort.

उच्छास्त्रं शास्त्रितं चेति द्विविधं पौरुषं स्मृतम् ।
तत्रोच्छास्त्रमनर्थाय परमार्थाय शास्त्रितम् ।।

ucchāstraṃ śāstritaṃ ceti dvividhaṃ pauruṣaṃ smritam |
tatrocchāstramanarthāya paramārthāya śāstritam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 5, Sloka 4

The Disorganized Effort is acting without any rule or rhyme like going to a garden at night. Such an effort bears no fruit and is only a wasted labor. Sometimes it may even lead to disasters. For example, suppose a person has to cross a river. There is no bridge nearby. He doesn't know how to swim . Yet he jumps into the river. That is a disorganized effort. None should take up such actions.

An Organized Human Effort is to undertake actions in accordance with the principles approved by the scriptures. Only such actions yield the desired results. In the case of achieving the Ultimate Bliss, the Self-Knowledge, also only Organized Effort as prescribed in the scriptures will yield the expected result.

23. PAST ACTION AND PRESENT ACTION

While discussing karma (action), we mentioned two types of actions --actions done in the present and actions done in the past. Sometimes they conform to each other. Suppose a person is born in an educated family, goes through scholarly studies and now in higher academia. Let us say that his actions in his past life were also conducive to good education. Then the action of the past and the present conform to each other and he will easily become a Pundit in the present life.

It may so happen that the past actions and the present actions are contrary to one another. In the aforesaid example we said that he is now studying in a good school. Suppose in his previous birth he burnt down the schools, books etc., and let loose anarchy. The effect of his previous actions will now stand in his way of getting a good education. The present action of studying in a good school will help him to get a good education. If the past and present actions are inimical to each other, they fight each other. In this duel, sometimes the effect of the past action triumphs. Sometimes the present action triumphs. Yet other times the strengths of both may be equal and the result would be neutral. We sometimes find those who live a principled life and act conscientiously suffering with ill health and difficulties. It means that the effect of their past actions is very strong and is overtaking the present period.

What is the advantage of knowing all this? You may say that there is no use knowing this because whatever was the karma in the past, it would win or lose depending on its strength. But remember, I have also told you that the present action will win if it is strong. That is the point to be highlighted. A seeker should steadfastly make an effort to destroy the deleterious effects of the past actions. And a seeker can do that. That is the reason I am emphasizing this point.

We have noted that what arises as an impediment to the present effort is the effect of the actions of the previous birth. Some people misinterpret its meaning. They think that the present actions are governed by what was done in the past lives and therefore, there is no freedom for the action in the now to be different. This is a very wrong way to think. Such thoughts should be banished from the mind. Let us examine a bit more closely the intentions of the people who argue on those lines.

24. DOMINANCE OF THE PRESENT ACTION

The person is the same whether it is the karma (action) of the past or the present. He says that the current actions are bound by the past actions. The underlying presumption for such a statement is that the effect of the past action is much more powerful than the present action. But he has neither a reason nor a shred of evidence to say so. Strictly speaking, the present action in the current life has to be more powerful because I can directly see it in the now. Can an enemy who is far away from you deliver a severe blow to you? Therefore, to hold that the past action is more powerful is merely his imagination, an escapism.

प्राक्तनः पुरुषार्थोऽसौ मां नियोजयतीति धीः ।
बलादधस्पदीकार्या प्रत्यक्षादधिका न सा ।।

prāktanaḥ puruṣārtho'sau māṃ niyojayatīti dhīḥ |
balādadhaspadīkāryā pratyakṣādadhikā na sā ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 5, Sloka 10

A seeker should abandon the false impression that the past karma is more powerful. He should strive ceaselessly in the present till the effect of past action is destroyed.

Suppose you had indigestion last night. By the next morning, there is flatulence with cramps in the stomach. What will you do? The best thing is to fast as per the medical advice. In the same way, a seeker on the spiritual path should never succumb to the feeling that he is unable to surmount the hindrances on the path. No spiritual practitioner should think that he is facing obstructions in his *sādhana* because of his fate. He should persevere with his righteous practices as laid down in scriptures.

Another shortcoming often found with the seekers is comparing themselves with indolent people. This should never be done. A seeker should emulate a caged lion. The lion restlessly tries to break out of the cage. It continues its effort till its death. The obstructions arising in his path are like a cage for him. Like the lion, a seeker must continuously try to get out of the mire of this world till his last breath. That is *sādhana* (Practice).

25. SADHANA

I shall now elaborate on *sādhana* (Practice). A seeker should always remember that the body is prone to decay. He should not let ignorance overtake him. He should keep the company of righteous and noble people. He should study scriptures. He may have a family life. He may have children. But he should not be under the delusion that those pleasures are the ultimate goals of his life. His practice should be directed towards higher goals .

We have already established that what goes by the name 'destiny' is nothing but the fruits of past actions. We also found out that there is no truth in the concept that the past karma is more powerful than the present action.The Vedas also say the same thing. Vedas are able to prescribe expiatory methods for atoning the effect of past actions only because of that reason. Some people are unable to give up their belief in the so-called destiny in spite of conclusively proving by reason and showing evidence from the scriptures that human effort stands supreme.

A scholarly person saw on waking up in the morning two snakes lying on either side of him. He shouted "Snakes!Snakes!" and started to run.The snakes did not leave him. They ran along with him. On hearing his shouts, the people in the street asked him where the snakes were. He showed his hands. They were surprised and said, "Don't be a fool. They are your hands." But the scholar insisted that they were not his hands because they were long with a fang at the end. He blamed them for being so dumb as not to see the snakes. The people who believe in destiny are like this scholar. Success will always elude such people.

A spiritual aspirant should strive to acquire the Fourfold Aids of Seeking with conscious effort.

[**Note:** Sage Valmiki did not use the phrase Fourfold Aids of Seeking (*sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*). But he used the terms like discrimination, study of scriptures and *satsAngatya* (Association with virtuous people). We can infer from these words and the other verses on *sādhana* that the Sage had in his mind the Fourfold Aids of Seeking (*sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*). A reference was made to Fourfold Aids of Seeking (*sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti* in the previous chapter *vairāgya prakaraṇa* also. Let us see what it is :

26. FOUR FOLD AIDS OF SEEKING

If you want to learn music, it is not enough if you get by heart the names of '*rāgā*-s' (tunes). Initially, you should practice for a tone to master the three levels of, higher, middle and lower, pitch. In the same way, if you want to realize '*ātma vidya*' (Self- Knowledge), you must first fulfill certain pre-requisites. The pre-requisites define the eligibility (*adhikAra*). They constitute the Fourfold Aids of Seeking (*sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*).

They are:

i. nityānityavastuviveka (Discrimination between the eternal (Truth) and the ephemeral (the objects of the world).

ii. ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga (Renunciation of the worldly desires or desires pertaining to Heaven).

iii. śamādi ṣatkasampatti (Attainment of The Sixfold Treasures like the control of the internal organs, control of the external organs etc.).
iv. mumukśatvam (Unceasing Desire for Liberation).

nityānityavastuviveka :

viveka is the discriminative knowledge that helps to differentiate the ephemeral objects from the eternal. We normally consider all those objects that outlive us as permanent. Though we know that certain objects perish in the course of time, we continue to love them as long as they exist. We crave to possess them. For instance we know that a flower will wither away by evening; yet we are infatuated by it.

If an object exists for some time and then disappears, we assume its existence to be real while it lasts. We reason that a thing exists because it is there when we see it. Though we argue so, we don't accept a treasure seen in a dream to be real ! Even though we did see the treasure, we do not ascribe reality to it. We hold that though it is seen, the dream treasure does not really exist. Does it not mean that we take different positions at different times? Is it not inconsistent?

If we accept that an object truly exists as long as it is seen, then the treasure we saw in a dream should also have existed when we were seeing it. If so, questions will arise about how it originated and where it has gone after the dream ended. We don't have answers to such questions. So, it is not possible to accept that the treasure was true even when we saw it in the dream. If we generalize this we have to agree that a thing need not be true simply because it is seen. It follows that it does not have a true existence if it is seen for a while and disappears after a while . In other words, it is unreal even when we are seeing it !

Therefore, only a thing that exists in the past, present, and the future without any change should be taken to be real. Only that possesses real Beingness (Existence). That is the way scriptures also define the eternal. If it does not exist even for a moment at any time, it amounts to saying that it does not exist in all the three times, according to the scriptures.

Viewed from such a perspective, only the Supreme Self can be 'Real'. Unlike what we think, the Vedas, *śāstra-s*, *purāṇa*-s, and all the classic scriptures also in one voice affirm the unreality of the world. Assimilating this knowledge is *nityAnitya vastu viveka*'. This is the first step in *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*.

ihāmutraphalabhoga virāga:

This is the second step. It's a fancy name for detachment (*vairāgya)*. To be desireless is *vairāgya*. The desirelessness should be for the comforts and pleasures not only of this world but also of the higher worlds (heaven). But how does a desire originate? A desire is usually engendered when one sees or hears about an object which he considers to be real and thinks that it would be beneficial for him. For instance, one sees a nugget of silver on the seashore. He wants to grab it.

A well-wishing friend tells him that it is not real silver but only a shell that is glittering in the sunlight. He examines it closely. He finds it to be nacre. It had only the appearance of silver. He would then have no desire for it, for he has understood it to be unreal. This is *vairāgya* ! What is the reason for the detachment? It is the knowledge that what was seen to be silver is not really so.

Let us take another example. A boy offers you a delicious looking mango. You are about to take it. Just then you receive an alert saying that your enemies sent it through that boy and there is a bomb inside the mango. Would you love that boy or the mango after that? Not at all. The mango was very tasteful and delicious in your thoughts, while you were ignorant of the bomb hidden in it. The moment you knew it would be a great danger to your life, you lost the love for it. This is detachment. The reason for this detachment is that there will be no benefit from these objects. When we understand that all the things seen in the world are unreal like the silver in the nacre, and could even be harmful like the mango in the above example, we develop true *vairāgya* or detachment.

There are two types of experiences.

1. Those of this world (*iha*) 2. Those of the next world (*Amutra*)

We reap the results of our work in this world commensurate with the effort we put in. If we work hard in the farm lands, we can get more crops. The harvested yield will be exhausted in course of time with our consumption. We have to once again labor hard to procure another crop. The comforts and the luxuries that we get in heaven owing to our meritorious deeds, also depend on the amount of accrued merit. With the good and hard work done, one may enjoy the fruits in heaven. If one puts in more effort, one may be rewarded with a life in the Brahma Loka or still higher worlds like *vaikunTha* or *kailasha*, the abodes of Vishnu and Shiva respectively. But like the yield derived from the farm lands gets exhausted through consumption, the acquired merit too gets exhausted some day or the other through the enjoyment of life in the higher worlds.

As far as the actions in this world go, one can continue to work for additional fruits while simultaneously enjoying the results of his previous deeds. It is like a farmer working on his farm for a new crop while consuming the harvest from the previous sowing. But it is not possible to do so with respect to the fruits experienced in the other worlds (heaven and hell). When you are enjoying the fruits of your virtuous deeds there, you cannot at the same time earn more virtue. You have to enjoy the results completely till they are exhausted, and then be reborn on the earth to perform further action. Thus the fruits that are to be enjoyed in the other worlds are not only unreal but also responsible for causing more misery. One who understands this fact will be disinterested to seek enjoyment either in this or the other worlds. But the important point is that the aversion should be intense. Only then can it be called detachment. It is easy to refuse a sweetmeat offered to you when you are already full in your stomach. That will not qualify as detachment. The detachment should be so strong that even if one is offered the position of Brahma (The Creator), one should walk away from it with repulsion. A complete lack of desire is true detachment. Only such a detachment is "*ihāmutra phala bhoga virāga*."

śamādi ṣatka sampatti:

A seeker should in addition possess six qualities. They are:

ṣama (Control of mind)
ḍama (Control of the outer organs)
ūparati (Withdrawal from desire)
ṭitīkśa (Forbearance)
ṣraddha (Sincerity)
ṣamādhana (Focus, equipoise)

The attainment of these qualities is '*śamādi ṣatka sampatti.*' It is also called '*śamadamādi ṣatka sampatti*.'

ṣama:

ṣama is the control of the mind, also called the inner organ. We get a variety of thoughts in our mind because of the tendencies we have developed from our past lives. Psychologists tell us that the mind is not concerned with the quality of thoughts – good or bad. All types of thoughts occur. '*ṣama*' is to control the stream of random thoughts using the mind itself. It means that the random thoughts that arise as a consequence of our past deeds are ignored, and effort is made to sustain only that line of thinking which is decided to be beneficial and desirable. People having strong will power can achieve '*ṣama*' by firm *saṃkalpa* (intention). Others have to take recourse to '*dama*.'

ḍama:

ḍama is the control of the outer body organs. They are ten - the five sensory and the five motor organs. When a desire enters the mind as a result of the residual effects of the actions done in the previous births, the outer organs work for the fulfillment of the desire. A seeker should discriminate between good and bad desires with the help and the guidance of scriptures. Even if the mind craves for the fulfilment of the undesirable desires, curtailing the action of the ten outer organs is called '*ḍama*.' '*ḍama*' has to be achieved through will power.

Control of the outer organs is easier than controlling the mind because controlling the outer organs requires lesser will power. If one practices "*ḍama*" diligently, will power increases and helps in achieving '*ṣama*' without difficulty.

If "*ḍama*" is practiced for deceit or self-glorification, the desires in the mind may coalesce and strongly rebel at an opportune time. The seeker then loses both *ṣama* and *ḍama* . It is very essential to practice *ḍama* with diligence, confidence and seriousness of purpose.

ūparati*:*

ūparati is withdrawal. We are attracted and enticed by the things of the world – be it a beautiful object seen, a melodious sound heard, a pleasant fragrance, soft touch or a tasty food. We feel that there is something special with these things and we fall for them. It is only with discriminatory knowledge, we get to know that they have no intrinsic value, and they are not permanent either. We find that they lead us finally to misery. Once we understand this and practice to note the defects in them, our attraction for them diminishes and our sensory organs stop running after them. This type of withdrawal is *ūparati*.

Thus, discriminative knowledge leads us to *ūparati, ūparati* to *ḍama* and *ṣama*. On the other hand, it will backfire if "*ḍama*" is achieved or practiced in order to gain some benefit. For instance, a person with a thieving mind may give up robbing out of the fear that he would be beaten if caught. But he will not hesitate to steal when he notices the play field free of such danger. The demons who took up intense deep meditation controlling their senses received boons from Lord Brahma. But they behaved in despicable ways afterwards. So we get favorable results only if *ūparati* is achieved through discriminative knowledge and *ḍama* through such *ūparati* .

titīkśa:

'*titīkśa'* is forbearance. One tries to protect one self by adopting counter measures when faced with adverse conditions. He may earn demerit in the process by pursuing prohibited acts. A wise man does not resort to improper means in countering sorrows, because he is aware that the current bad period is a result of the bad karma done in previous births. Further, being aware of the transient nature of all things in the visible world, he also knows that both happiness and misery in this world are transitory. Hence sorrows bear no significance for him. Just as he does not make any effort to obtain sensory pleasures, he will not do anything to overcome the sorrows that arise because of the senses. This is titīkśa. *titīkśa*works as a gateway for *uparati*.

śraddha:

'*śraddha'*is trust with faith and full attention. Fulfilment of the aforesaid four qualities is obtained through the application of discriminating wisdom. The discretionary wisdom comes through the instructions in the scriptures. The instructions from the scriptures are taught by a teacher. For a proper understanding of what is taught, the student should have trust in the teacher, and pay full attention to the scriptural instructions. Then only, the student will be able to realize the teaching. So *śraddha* is the foundation for the other four aspects.

We sometimes have contradictory understanding. For example, we think that "this body is mine." But again we feel, "I am the body." When the teacher analyzes such feelings in search of the truth, what he and the *śāstra-s* teach us may appear contrary to our experience. But if we examine their teaching with sincerity and follow their advice carefully, we cross over our confusion, reach the correct conclusion and obtain true knowledge.

If we reject the teachings of the teachers and the *śāstra-s* at the initial stage of analysis itself, we land in confusion. So, our approach should be to begin our practice with faith in what the teachers and the *śāstra*-s say. Such faith is called '*śraddha*'.

samādhāna:

'*samādhāna'* is focus. Usually focus depends on the intensity of the desire or fear or similar feelings. For instance, at the approach of the examinations, the focus of the students increases. But it is not *samādhāna*.

When a sincere seeker takes up an inquiry into the root cause of the world around and what lies behind 'who or what I am,' he develops a natural disinterest in worldly matters. His attention gets totally focused on inquiring into the essence of Self. Only such a focus deserves to be called '*samādhāna.*

samādhāna may come by on its own, owing to the effects of past deeds. *samādhāna* leads to discretion. Discretion helps the growth of *samādhāna*. They mutually reinforce each other. *śraddha* develops because of these two. *śraddha* combined with *samādhāna* leads to *titīkśa. titīkśa* in turn leads to *uparati,* and *uparati* causes *dama*. *dama* causes *śama*. These six aspects put together become *śama damādi ṣaṭka sampatti, the third step in the 'sādhana catuṣṭaya'.*

mumukśatva:

The etymological meaning of *mumukśatva* is the desire for liberation. However, in Vedanta *shAstra, mumukśatva* stands for an intense desire for liberation. What is meant by intense desire? Suppose the house collapses in a major quake when everyone is asleep. The owner wakes up and tries to get out of that house picking up money, wife and children. When that becomes impossible, he tries to go out rescuing wife and children, leaving the money. But when the whole house goes into flames and it's not even possible to save anyone or anything, he forgets everything and runs to save himself. At that time he doesn't think of any earnings or savings or the family. His only thought will be first to try to get out of the dangerous situation. That defines what an 'intense desire' means.

When the sorrows in the worldly life become too intense to bare, if an individual becomes wise enough to leave all his desires and becomes eager to merge with the absolute, that intense desire is called '*mumukśatva,* desire for liberation. So, in *mumukśatva,* all desires, except the desire for liberation, get discarded. The other desires are called '*eṣaṇa*-s'. There are three types of *eṣaṇa*-s : 1. *dāraiṣaṇa* ; 2. *putraiṣaṇa;* and 3. *dhanaiṣaṇa.* They are known as the *eṣaṇa* triad. *dāraiṣaṇa* is the sum of all desires related to the wife. It represents the desires of all the senses. *putraiṣaṇa* is the sum of all desires related to children. It symbolizes attachment to relationships. *dhanaiṣaṇa* is the sum of all desires related to wealth, power and fame. *Mumukshatva* is the eagerness for detachment from these snares of the world and a real longing for Self-realization. Only those who possess such an intense desire are eligible for being initiated into the Knowledge of the Self. As a result of *śama damādi ṣaṭka sampatti* ripens to a peak stage in the seekers.

So far we have discussed the four steps of *sādhana catuṣṭaya* that entitle men to take up a study of '*ātma vidya* .' We have also discussed the inter-relationships among these four aspects. For the sake of clarity and to stress the importance of these steps, we shall, once again, briefly review them.

The first step is *nityānitya vastu viveka* (Discrimination between the eternal (Truth) and the ephemeral (the objects of the world). Learned men may acquire this knowledge through a study of scriptural texts. The second step, *ihāmutra phalabhoga virāga* (Renunciation of the worldly desires or desires pertaining to the Heaven), sets in when the seeker reflects on what he learnt from his teacher and scriptures and strengthen his knowledge through his own observation of the world and his own inner feelings. These two qualities accrue in those who undertake deep meditation. Still, some of them may be vulnerable to flashes of anger and passion. Several Maharshis's lives stand as examples. In order to surmount such shortcomings, the third step, *śamādi ṣatka sampatti* (Attainment of The Sixfold Treasures like the control of the internal organs, control of the external organs etc.), has been advised. These three steps, by and large, enable one to be worthy of pursuing the study of the divine Knowledge. But at this stage also, some people are likely to get into a thoughtless and vacant state of mind. They alienate themselves from Self-inquiry. To safeguard against this probability, the fourth step, *mumukśatvam* is prescribed.

"Rama! A seeker should acquire the fourfold treasures of *sādhana catuṣṭaya* through constant effort. A few people get scared when we talk in detail about *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*. They doubt if they can ever undertake such a task. But a person, who is skillful, will easily attain *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*. For example, a Gemmologist can easily recognize a real and pure gemstone in a heap of cobble and rubble. He has the mastery of the technique in picking the precious stone. Similarly one who aspires to acquire the *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti* should also get hold of necessary skills. Three approaches are available for this.

27. THREE APPROACHES

The three clues that aid in the successful achievement of *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpatti* are *sadācāra* (good conduct), *satsAngatya* (association with noble people) and *sacchāstra* (holy scriptures).

A question that worries some people is about the duration of the practice -- how long one should continue to practice *sādhana catuṣṭaya.* Some people think that the acquired Self Knowledge will end if the practice is stopped. Actually, it is not necessary to practice endlessly. The practice is done for a finite time only. Once Self-realization is achieved, there is no further need for any practices.

What I am proposing in terms of human effort is not a new theory propounded by me. There was an emperor called Nala in ancient times. He was once possessed by Kali Purusha. Nala overpowered him with determination. You must have already heard about that story. That is an example for human effort.

You know the story of King Harischandra . Persevering in his path of adherence to Truth, he could attain a position equivalent to Indra. It is the well-accepted word of the elders that human effort should never be given up.

Please note that obstinacy is of no use for achieving the Knowledge of the Self. *sadācāra* (good conduct)*, satsāngatya* (association with noble people) and *sacchāstra*(study of holy scriptures) are the right means. These three should be practiced right from childhood for full benefit. Adopting them at a late age may not bear any fruit.

28. INDOLENCE

Indolence is the main reason for not practicing the aforesaid techniques. Laziness and sloth are the enemies for human beings not only in spiritual matters but also in worldly affairs.

आलस्यं यदि न भवेज्जगत्यनर्थः
को न स्याद्बहुधनको बहुश्रुतो वा ।
आलस्यादियमवनिः ससागरान्ता
संपूर्णा नरपशुभिश्च निर्धनैश्च ।।

ālasyaṃ yadi na bhavejjagatyanarthaḥ
ko na syādbahudhanako bahuśruto vā |
ālasyādiyamavaniḥ sasāgarāntā
saṃpūrṇā narapaśubhiśca nirdhanaiśca ||

Mumukshu Vyavahtra Prakarana, Sarga 5, Sloka 30

Meaning: Who will not be rich among the earthly beings and who will not be well learned, but for their laziness? It is laziness that creates many destitutes and illiterates among the people. Such lazy people are like human animals."

[**Note:** Sage Vasishta was known for his soft spoken nature. But even he was overcome by anger, when it came to laziness. For, what is more important is smartness and alertness than even the possession of knowledge.]

"A smart person can easily earn money. Likewise, he can learn Self- Knowledge too provided he does not leave '*satsāngatya*' (Association with noble people). There is no harm even if he does not have detachment. He will be able to achieve it some day or other. He will tend to earn knowledge with a determined bid, as he earned money earlier. On the other hand, detachment can never be obtained by lazy or dull folk.They fool themselves by mistaking their sloth to be detachment. So a seeker cannot afford to be lazy.

satsāngatya is the chief of the three practices mentioned above. One should begin to practice it as he crosses childhood into adulthood. From *satsāngatya* one will come to know the good and bad in different things."

By the time Maharishi Vasishta's preaching reached this stage, it was nearing sunset. Philosophical discussions in those days were done according to certain prescribed norms. As it was necessary for all to perform the worship of the Sun in the evening, the meeting was adjourned to the next morning.

Maharshi Vasishta continued his preaching the next day as follows.

29. DOES DESTINY EXIST?

Vasishta: Sri Rama! I said yesterday that destiny is nothing but the effects of past actions. Thus we have only actions--of the past or in the present. Suppose a person indulged in a wrong action yesterday and he realized his mistake today. Immediately, he took up a remedial action as prescribed in the scriptures.The effect of the bad action done yesterday is neutralized. Similarly the bad karma from the previous births can be neutralized through the performance of virtuous deeds in this birth.

Rama: Suppose a person has begun to perform a virtuous act. A fellow inimical to him destroys it. Are not such interruptions due to destiny?

Vasishta: Rama! We can clearly notice two things in operation here. One is the intention of the first person who wanted to perform a good deed. The other is the intention of the second person who is determined to spoil it. Of these two, the intention of the latter was strong. So the effort of the first person was defeated. When the success and defeat of an action can thus be seen directly, why do you have to invoke an unseen destiny? If you are unable to perceive any cause, there may be a reason to assume an invisible operator. Where is such a necessity in this case? Why bring in destiny now?

Rama: Sir! There were two fruits hanging together from the same branch. Myself and my friend took one each. The fruit I picked was pulpy and sweet. What my friend got was hollow and astringent. When the same branch has fruits of two different qualities, can it be 'destiny'?

Vasishta: Destiny has no role even in this case. Whether it is any object, fruit or anything else, what one obtains depends on one's own karma done in the past. Your friend has not earned proper merit from his past deeds. He had to experience the bitter fruit as an effect of his past work. There is nothing other than the effects of past karma.

Rama: Life supporting rivers, very prominent mountains and bright stars are all disintegrating in this world. Is it not due to fate?

Vasishta: That is also not destiny. There is a being, extraordinaire. His name is 'Shiva'. His job is to destroy things. He follows a specific order in the act of annihilation. In other words, it is because of his effort that things get destroyed. Except that, there is no 'destiny'.

Rama: Sir! In some countries, there is a custom. If there are no descendants to the ruler, the Ministers assemble and arrange to take out the Royal Elephant in a procession, holding a garland of flowers on its trunk. As it roams in the streets of the city, if it puts that garland on the neck of a beggar. The beggar from that moment becomes the king. Is it not destiny?

Vasishta: Rama! Where is destiny in it? When the citizens accept such a tradition, in that acceptance, there is their 'effort.' In taking out the elephant in a procession, there is the 'effort' of the ministers. In putting the garland in the neck of a beggar, there is an 'effort' on the part of the elephant. Where is destiny?

Rama: Sir! Destiny is likely to have a role in the last part. Why should that elephant garland a particular beggar ? It could have chosen any other. There, I say, is the work of destiny. Destiny could play its role there.

Vasishta: Rama! Think ! Why did the citizens choose an elephant and not a dog or a fox for this task ? It is because, the people knew from their experience that the elephant had certain natural instinctive capability in recognizing a worthy person. So they gave the garland to that elephant. The elephant utilized its natural instinctive knowledge in offering the garland to the beggar. This is nothing but the 'effort' on the part of the elephant. Rama! In addition to the 'instinct' of the elephant, the good deeds done in the past by the beggar coalesced with the 'effort' on the part of the elephant. So, there is nothing more than the 'instinctive discretion' of the elephant combined with the merit acquired in the previous birth of the beggar that is in play. There is no destiny at all.

[**Note:** In the modern day, we are not prepared to accept that the elephant can have the power to recognize a man as worthy of being a ruler. We think that an elephant putting a garland on the neck of anybody is just a random chance. But biologists have established that every animal has a specific type of intrinsic discriminating knowledge.

For instance, dogs have an extra intrinsic knowledge of smell. The Police Department utilizes this skill of the dogs to catch criminals. Horses have the quality of recognizing friends and foes. So, until recently, horses were used in wars. Donkeys have the power to recognize the advent of rain in advance. So the farmers in the villages used to depend on the sense of the donkeys to begin their agricultural operations. A rooster has the sense of recognizing daybreak. It is still prevalent in some villages for people to get up from the bed in the morning hearing the rooster's cockadoodledoo. In view of these facts, we may not be able to rule out the elephant's ability to choose a worthy person for royal duties. Unfortunately, we are not in a position in the present day geopolitical conditions to verify the capability of the elephants in choosing a worthy king. We have, however, good evidence that such a custom existed in the olden days.]

Rama: Sir! A cultivator had toiled hard throughout the year to grow a good crop. He harvested the yield finally. When he was about to gather the grain into a bigheap, there was a sudden cloudburst.It rained heavily, and the entire harvested grain was destroyed. Had the rain been delayed just by a day, he could have completed the work of piling up the grain. As a result of the untimely rain, the entire year's labor of the farmer was annulled. Who is responsible for this calamity? What is it, if not destiny?

Vasishta: Rama! The God of clouds was responsible for this calamity. There is a God who is in charge of the clouds. He follows certain laws regarding where and when it should rain. His 'effort' lies in using these laws for his deeds. So, this is due to the 'effort' of the God of clouds and nothing else.

Rama: Master! The controller of the clouds is a God. An ordinary human being, a farmer, is on the ground. What can an ordinary human being do when the god seeks to destroy a man's toil in such a way? Further, the cloud God might destroy his crops once more, if the farmer takes up the farming work again. The poor farmer cannot stand against and fight the clouds. It is beyond his power. What shall he do in such circumstances?

Vasishta: Rama! A man has to perform his duty and should continue to do so. He should not think that a power mightier than him would destroy his work. The situation may sometimes turn out to be like that as happened in the case of the farmer in your example. If the result of the toil put in does not go as anticipated, one should not worry over it. He should examine whether he did his duty to his best or not. If an unexpected calamity beyond one's power befalls, one should not grieve over it.

यन्न शक्नोमि तस्यार्थे यदि दुःखं करोम्यहम् ।
तदमारितमृत्योर्मे युक्तं प्रत्यहरोदनम् ।। ।

yanna śaknomi tasyārthe yadi duḥkhaṃ karomyaham |
tadamāritamṛtyorme yuktaṃ pratyaharodanam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 6, Sloka 22

Meaning : If I have to grieve over a thing that is beyond my ability to overcome, I have to remain crying every day since I cannot conquer death.

It is not proper to cry over spilled milk. If an effort fails, though done in accordance with the accepted principles of the'*śāstra*,'one has to try again and again. He should neither get irritated nor develop a negative attitude. So, Rama! A man should recognize and remember that he himself is responsible for his happiness and misery.

30. THE TRIAD OF THROBS

Rama! You should be very clear what we mean by 'human effort.' Please follow closely what I say. An effort implies movement. Another name for it is '*spanda'*|

संवित्स्पन्दो मनःस्पन्द ऐन्द्रियस्पन्द एव च ।
एतानि पुरुषार्थस्य रूपाण्येभ्यः फलोदयः ।।

saṃvitspando manaḥspanda aindriyaspanda eva ca |
etāni puruṣārthasya rūpāṇyebhyaḥ phalodayaḥ ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 7, Sloka 4

There are three types of movement. They are:

1. *ṣamvitspanda;* 2. *mānasa spanda;* and 3. *indriya spanda*

If an action is done anywhere by anyone, it obviously implies that some labor has gone into executing it and there is some effort in doing it. What does effort mean? Effort is the movement of the sensory and motor organs. I shall call it ' *indriya spanda*.' Movement of the organs is not done randomly. The movement has to be orchestrated well conforming to the objective of the task on hand.

For example, a painter thought of drawing a picture. The sensory and action organs should move in such a way that the picture gets drawn. It means there is a purpose behind the movements of the organs. What is the purpose ? Purpose is a thought. It is like any other desire – 'I want this thing' or 'I want this work done.' So purpose or desire is a movement in the mind. I call it '*mānasa spanda*'.

How does a desire arise? What causes it? A man thinks that he will be happy if he gets a particular object or does a specific work. This knowledge (of the way to be happy) produces a desire within him to get that particular object or to take up that specific action. There is a large variety of such knowledge (which informs a man about the way to achieve happiness) in this world. This man at this moment has got the knowledge that getting a particular object makes him happy. This is a movement in his knowledge. So I call it '*ṣamvitspanda.'*. '*samvit*' means knowledge. *Ṣamvitspanda* means movement in the knowledge or consciousness.

There is an effort behind every action. There is desire behind every effort. There is knowledge behind every desire. Thus, knowledge arises first, then comes a desire which is followed by an effort before an action takes place. This sequence is knowledge-desire-effort syndrome. I call them *samvit- mānasa- indriya spanda*-s and the resultant outcome is 'action.'

I have called everything a *spanda* because the fundamental nature of any action is movement or *spanda*. If we examine in depth, you find that movement exists everywhere in this world. There is no *spanda*, however, where there is laziness. Therefore, a seeker should discard laziness and take recourse to *spanda*. My purpose of creating this terminology is to impress on the importance of "movement (*spanda*). *spanda* is involved whether the matter pertains to this or the next world. So at the root of obtaining any desired result lies human effort which is movement. Laziness is the opposite of *spanda*.

Rama! Push laziness aside. Take care to see that your body is not prone to distress or disease. Maintain a healthy body and focus your mind on the Self. That is all the 'effort' you have to put in now. The results you get in this world depend on the amount of the effort you put in. Jupiter could become the teacher for the gods based on the strength of his effort. If an individual could make it to be Indra (the Lord of the Gods), it was only because of his effort. Look around the world. We see people moving from rags to riches. Try to understand the effort made by them to achieve their target. In contrast, some people though born as millionaires become paupers, wasting away their wealth, steeped in laziness. Understand the importance of human effort !

Rama ! I shall now explain how the ‘human effort’ bears fruit.

शास्त्रतो गुरुतश्चैव स्वतश्चेति त्रिसिद्धयः ।
सर्वत्र पुरुषार्थस्य न दैवस्य कदाचन ।।

śāstrato gurutaścaiva svataśceti trisiddhayaḥ |
sarvatra puruṣārthasya na daivasya kadācana ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 7, Sloka 11

Meaning: Human effort sometimes bears fruit with the help of the *śāstra*-s. It may sometimes yield results with the blessings of the teachers. And it can fructify on its own too. Thus the result of effort manifests in three ways. There is no ‘divinity’ at all in any of this.

Occasionally, a man’s mind may get evil thoughts. Knowledge of *śāstra*-s helps negate those thoughts. The person brings back his mind onto the right track by making a determined effort, remembering what he learnt from the *śāstra*-s, and thinking about the possible repercussions to the wrong doings, if he were to pursue evil thoughts. Thus, human effort becomes fruitful with the help of *śāstra*-s.

śāstra-s deal with a variety of issues. The teacher guides the student in choosing the best of the paths taking into consideration the requirements of the student, his weak and strong points etc. so that the student will achieve his goal. If you pursue your effort following the instructions of the teacher, you will attain your goal much faster and in the most convenient manner. Thus the human effort becomes fruitful with the help of the teacher (Guru).

Whatever the *śāstra*-s may say, whatever the guidance from the Guru is, finally everything will depend on your own effort in practicing what you have learned. The results you get will be proportional to your effort. Thus human effort becomes fruitful on its own.

Rama! I trusted human effort and I obtained the desired results. I never got a single thing by the courtesy of destiny.

31. DESTINY IS A WORD OF SOLACE

If so, the question is why did the word ‘destiny’ come into use at all?

पौरुषाद्दृश्यते सिद्धिः पौरुषाद्धीमतां क्रमः ।
दैवमाश्वासनामात्रं दुःखे पेलवबुद्धिषु ।।

pauruṣāddṛśyate siddhiḥ pauruṣāddhīmatāṃ kramaḥ |
daivamāśvāsanāmātraṃ duḥkhe pelavabuddhiṣu ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 7, Sloka 15

When weak-hearted people are overtaken by a string of miseries, they often lose their sense of balance and the ability to think. This word 'destiny' is invented as a solace to such weaklings. Other than that, there is no truth in it.

Rama! People invite problems and difficulties onto themselves by their own deeds. There is some 'effort' in that too! That sort of an effort is termed as 'lunatic effort (*unmatta ceṣṭa*).' We should not call it really 'human effort.' The effort that goes with the association of noble people, study of *śāstra*-s, and discretion should be called 'human effort.' Only then does the effort produce good results. Service to the teacher and study of the scriptures contributes to the Knowledge of the Self. A person's knowledge improves as he practices what he learnt, With improving knowledge 'human effort' grows. With more effort, better results accrue. Rama! Adopt human effort as your key.

Some people argue that God will take care of everything. They believe that everything goes according to destiny. I wish they jump into burning fire vesting their faith in God! It is not that these believers in fate are not bothered to do any worship, observe daily ablutions or other routines.They do not leave everything to God relying that God would give them comforts in the next world. They conduct some prayers and perform some rituals. If we ask them to perform those rituals as approved in the scriptures, they invoke God and say that it is up to Him. Whatever religious practices they observe have, after all, been given to them by a teacher. The teacher could instruct them because he used his muscles, cheeks, tongue etc. There is an effort by the teacher in moving his organs. Thus it is clearly the 'effort' of the teacher that enabled these people to receive the instructions. What is the wisdom then to attribute the instructions to a god and not to the teacher?

If anything gets done in this world, it is only because someone or the other has moved his body organs. Suppose a sculptor is paralyzed when he is working on a statue, will God come and complete the sculpture? From whichever perspective we may view, God is not perceived directly nor do we find him in the *śāstra*-s. So, we could confidently say that there is no god.

32. IS DESTINY THE DOER OR A TOOL?

Rama! People, who argue that there is God and that God will take care of everything, have to think of one more thing. Is the God they speak about the doer of the action ? Or is He an enabling tool for the action ? Does he work with a remote control ? When we see the doer of an action right in front of us, it is not convincing to say that there is another doer called God.

One may suggest that God is an instrument for the action. But an instrument will always be subordinate to the doer. But the God they talk about is not under their control. Does God exist separate from the instrument ?

We can see three entities directly – the subject who is the doer; the instrument with which the action is done and finally the action itself. Why should we bring an extraneous element, viz. God, who is not connected with any of them? It does not make sense. Therefore, the conception of God defies logic.

Rama: Revered Master! There are two students under one teacher. Both of them are intelligent and good . The teacher likes both. But only one of them learns *shAstra* well. The other does not get it so well. Though both the students are equal in all other aspects, there is a noticeable difference in their knowledge. Some reason has to exist for the difference between the two students. Why cannot one suppose that the reason is explained as the God?

Vasishta: Rama! What we know is that although all other things are equal in case of both the students, their progress differs in the study of the śāstra-s. The fact is that you don't know what could be the reason for the difference. So you are inventing a reason. You say the reason is God. You imagine that God helped one and didn't help the other. When we conceive of a reason, it should be logical. The concept that his past action was not proper and, therefore, his education did not go well would be more reasonable. Past actions and their consequences do exist definitely at some point of time and space. We are invoking the same as a possible cause. It meets with the approval of the *śāstra*-s.

The believers in God, posit the God as the cause. Where is that God? When did he exist? Do the scriptural texts accept it ? There are no answers to these questions. Hence, it does not make sense to invent a God as the reason in the instance you cited.

Or let us look at it from another angle. Let us presume that there is a God. Let us also grant that God has been helping the first student. If that is so, a relationship must exist between the one who gives help and the one who receives.

Here one who receives the help is a student. He has a definite form. The God Destiny they invoke is formless, like space. How are these two related ? How can the formless space get anything done by anybody ? Obviously, the God you are referring to cannot possibly do either any good or any bad to anybody. What is the purpose of such a God ? Wouldn't it be better to say that there is no God at all?

Some Astrologers predict the longevity of a person based on the horoscope and charts. They say that a person would live up to 90 years because God is favorable to him. If longevity is fixed by God, even if that man is beheaded, he should live up to 90. If anybody lives like that, then we can believe in God.

Rama! Why go far? Consider Maharshi Vishwamitra. He attained the position of 'Brahmarshi.' Did he depend on God for that? No. It was because of his 'human effort.' He was never concerned with God.

Some of us travel in space through celestial paths. How did we achieve such powers? Is it because of God ? It is because we strove hard for years to achieve them. I can give a number of such examples.

Even a dried up root might contain some energy to germinate, but the concept of a God is totally hollow!

सकलकारणकार्यविवर्जितं निजविकल्पवशादुपकल्पितम् ।
त्वमनपेक्ष्य हि दैवमसन्मयं श्रय शुभाशय पौरुषमुत्तमम् ।।

sakalakāraṇakāryavivarjitaṃ nijavikalpavaśādupakalpitam |
tvamanapekṣya hi daivamasanmayaṃ śraya śubhāśaya pauruṣamuttamam

Mumukshu Vyvahara Prakarana, Sarga 8, Sloka 26

Rama! God is neither the cause nor the effect. He is born because of somebody's imagination. Such, so-called God has to be ignored. As a desirer of absolute good, one has to take refuge in human effort."

33. DESTINY IS SPACE-LIKE

No sooner did Vasishta say so, Rama shot a searching question.

Rama: "Revered Master! On one hand you argue that there is no God at all. On the other hand you say that the effect of the actions done by men in the previous births is the God. Please let us clearly know whether you accept or deny the existence of God.

Further, you said that the effects of the past and the present actions might sometimes be opposing each other like two fighting rams. But the tastes, aspirations etc. of a human being in his current life are an outcome of his actions in his previous birth. You agreed that a man's nature and tastes take shape according to the past actions. How could there be hostility between the past and the present actions? You yourself said that the past and the present actions of a man could sometimes complement one another. So, it follows that he leads his present life according to those traits. If you accept this, you have to also admit that there is no freedom for actions in the present birth. What then is the use of urging him repeatedly into effort?

Moreover, there is a popular notion that God impacts the life of great men in the world. Do you accept this or not? Kindly answer unambiguously."

When Rama questioned so bluntly, Maharshi Vasishta also replied in the same tone.

Vasishta: Rama! What would you say if I ask how the sky is? You will reply that it is blue. Does it mean that the sky is an object with a blue color? If it is not an object, how can you say so? People normally don't go deep into any matter. They say the sky is blue in a general sense. You have also taken the general view and said that the sky is blue. If you are questioned further, you will admit that there is nothing like a sky and what is there is only a void. We see a sort of blue color because of the dispersion of the light. As we see it from a distance, we take it that the color is that of the sky. But the sky itself has no form or color from an absolute point of view. Nevertheless, you speak of it as blue; but on deeper questioning, you agree that it is without a form or color. Thus you also talk in contradictory terms!

Rama! My stand is similar with respect to God. In my theory, God is like space.

दैवमाकाशरूपं हि करोति न करोति च ।।

daivamākāśarūpaṃ hi karoti na karoti ca ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 7

Neither does God do anything in this world nor does He do nothing. How is this conundrum possible? Viewed from a discriminating outlook, God appears to do nothing. From the plebeian perspective, He appears to be 'doing' things. Suppose a man gets an unexpected advantage or loss. Unable to find any earthly reason for the sudden turn, people search for a possible cause. It occurs to them that it could be the result of the actions done in his previous life. They postulate then that this man has got this result in the present due to some past action. The believers in God name the past action as 'God.' The past action becomes synonymous to God. Of course we do occasionally come across a few sentences in praise of God in our texts. All such words are just a concession to the believers in God. Strictly speaking, there is no other significance to them. Rama! This is my firm conviction.

34. WHY BLAME THE DESTINY ?

Rama: Revered Master! You say that the effect of the past actions and God are synonyms. It means, you accept the existence of God. Then, why do you have to deny God?

Vasishta: Rama! You raised an important point. Please listen. I said that the effect of the past actions itself is destiny. But what is action (karma)? It is work done. What then is work? Remember I talked to you about the trio '*spandatraya?* Out of them, *indriyaspanda,* which is the movement of organs, is nothing but work. Prior to it, there are two more *spandā*-s viz., *mānaspanda and samvitspanda*. Though I categorized them separately, they are both actually a part of the mind. In other words, mind is behind the *indriyaspanda*. What then is mind ?

We have from *shruti*:

तन्मनो कुरुत आत्मन्वी स्यामिति

tanmano kuruta ātmanvī syāmiti

Brihadarnyakoanishat I-ii-1

Meaning: Mind is the '*vivarta*' (changeless change) of the Absolute.

What is '*vivarta*' (changeless change)?

One sees a rope as a snake due to mistaken vision. The snake is an illusion. The vision of objects born out of imagination is called '*vivarta*.' These illusory objects are unreal. They do not exist in reality. But there has to be a true rope for an illusory snake to arise. In the same way, a true thing should exist for the illusory mind to originate. The only one real thing that exists is the Supreme Self. The mind is born as a *vivarta* based on the Supreme Self.

Action or karma has arisen from the mind. We refer to karma as God. Now please tell me whether this God is real or unreal? Does He truly exist? Since the origin of action is also *vivarta* based on the mind, action is clearly non-existent. That is the reason I assert that God does not exist.

What is the object that truly exists when a rope is mistakenly seen to be a snake? It is the rope only. The snake is imagined on the rope. In the same way, the Supreme Self is the only reality. But a man imagines it to be something else and calls it by the names of mind, action, God etc. like the person under illusion shouting 'Snake!' on seeing a rope. Succumbing to the mind and karma, he performs various actions. As he continues doing the work, he gets certain results. If he doesn't do anything, he will not get any results. What I advise is that one should make an effort to carry out virtuous deeds in order to obtain good results. I call that as 'puruṣakāra' or 'human effort'.

35. THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Rama: MyMaster! You are right ! I have fallen into the trap of the illusion.I am a victim to the infatuations of the mind. I have been subservient to the mind for several births. I am completely under the control of the mind. I depend on it. I am weakling now. I dance to the dictates of my past deeds.Then, how can I function independently in this birth? What is the use of you asking me now to put in human effort?

Vasishta: Rama! You are missing an important point. You certainly are subject to some effects of your past birth. You cannot help there. Nevertheless, you are free to take up such actions in this birth that will enable you to obtain the results that you aspire for in your future birth. This is the secret the *śāstra*-s hold. So, none should consider that he enjoys no freedom to take up virtuous deeds in the present life. You may not get the desired results right away in this life. The effects of your past actions may hinder them. But for sure, you should not think that you have no freedom to act now to obtain favorable results in the future.

Rama! Think of yourself. You are born in a good royal family. Your ancestors were all well-educated. Your family is wealthy. All these factors do indicate that your past actions are congenial to your performing good deeds in this life. The tendencies ('*samskāra*-s') you possess in this life are undoubtedly conducive to take up meritorious acts. These auspicious circumstances will prevent bad things from happening. They will not stop favorable effects.The teachings from the '*karma brahma śāstra'* asking you to take up certain actions will have no meaning if you believe that you have no freedom to take up good actions even under such a promising and favorable environment as you have. Therefore, I aver that you have freedom to act now in order to reap beneficial effects in the coming births.

Forsaking all the auspicious elements in the present, if you become complacent, how can you expect 'good' results in the future births? All the ingredients are available in the house. The body is healthy and strong. But if one does not cook and eat food, can he appease the hunger ? Similarly, though you have an agreeable *samsakAra* from the past lives, you have to necessarily make the best effort in the present.

36. PREVENTION OF BAD *samskāra*-s

Rama! The *samskāra*-s or *vāsana*-s or the ideas that arise now in the mind as an effect of the actions in the past births are essentially of two types:

1. '*ṣubha vāsana*'(auspicious tendencies)
2. '*āśubha vāsana*' (inauspicious tendencies).

If one inherits the auspicious *samskāra*-s, he will attain liberation faster. If only the inauspicious *samskāra*-s are inherited, they will push the seeker, most of the time, into worldly enticement. The seeker has to resist them with all the force that he can muster. He has, therefore, to acquire good *samskāra*-s by performing good deeds in this birth.

You might wonder whether the bad *samskāra*-s from the past births would hinder his efforts and whether what has been inherited can be controlled now. There is a subtle point here. The past *samskāra*-s are like seeds. The seeds sprout only if the conditions are favorable.The seeds of the bad *samskāra*-s also, though inherited, can germinate (yield effects) only if the ambient circumstances are conducive. For instance, say, one has a tendency to rob as a result of past *samskāra.* For that quality to show up in action, he must also get the supporting '*samskāra*' of bad friends and his association with them. If there is no scope for him to associate himself with wrong doers, and there is no opportunity to steal, he cannot rob in spite of having inherited the related bad *samskāra*.

So, if anyone recognizes that he has acquired certain bad *samskāra*-s as a legacy of the previous births, he should immediately develop association with noble people. He should study good books. If he persistently does so, the seeds of bad *samskāra-s* within him will dry up, and wither away. Once that happens, those 'seeds' will not be able to sprout bad effects even if the ambient conditions are favorable to them.

So, Rama! You need not feel sorry that you have become a slave to the *samskāra*-s of previous births or worry about them. On the contrary, if you continue to be distressed, it may lead you to depression. A depressed person will lose his mental agility and will not even attempt to take up this birth work that will result in good *samskāra*-s. You should not fall prey to such a situation. Gather yourself and work with a determined mind.

37. INNER SELF PRIMES THE ACTIONS

Rama: Revered Master! We have from the *brihadāraṇyakopaniśad* :

यो मनसि तिष्टन्मनसोन्तरः यं मनो न वेद यस्य मनः शरीरम्
यो मनोन्तरो यमयति एष त आत्मान्तर्याम्यमुतः ॥

yo manasi tiṣṭanmanasontaraḥ yaṃ mano na veda yasya manaḥ śarīram
yo manontaro yamayati eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmyamutaḥ

Brihadarnyakopanishat III-vii-20

Meaning: He who inhabits the mind (*manas*) but is within it, whom the mind does not know, whose body is the mind, and who controls the mind from within.

It means that there is one conscious being in my mind inspiring me from within. He is subtler than the mind. Even the mind cannot cognize him. Such a formidable, conscious being dwelling in my mind, makes me move. That is what the *śruti* says. Such a Supreme Being is within everybody. Knowers of it call him God. How then can you say that there is no God ? When such a formidable Being is seated within me making me act to his wish, I am like a puppet in his hands. What is the use of your ordering me to do this or abhor that?

Vasishta: Rama! What you have quoted is called '*antaryāmi brāhmaṇa*.' It does not say that such a formidable Knower is seated only in your mind. On the other hand it says that he also dwells inside the earth, without the knowledge of the Earth and assumes the earth as His body. He is the one who controls the earth as well as the five elemental forces. He also dwells in your '*prāṇa*' (life force) and bodily organs and controls them. Are you not the one who pervades your mind, '*prāṇa*' and the body organs? Is there someone else other than you in you ? Have you ever experienced the presence of having someone else within you?

Rama: I have no such experience. I do not feel I can accept that somebody else other than me dwells in me. But, how do we contradict what the Veda says?

Vasishta: I know that you would raise this question! Listen. The '*antaryāmi brāhmaṇa*' you referred to, after it gives a long list of all the things including you that the 'Conscious *puruṣa*' pervades and controls, also adds at the end as follows:

नान्योऽतोऽस्ति द्रष्टा, नान्योऽतोऽस्ति श्रोता,
नान्योऽतोऽस्ति मन्ता, नान्योऽतोऽस्ति विज्ञात

nānyo'to'sti draṣṭā, nānyo'to'sti śrotā,
nānyo'to'sti mantā, nānyo'to'sti vijñāta

Brihadarnanyakopanishat III-vii-23

Meaning: There is no other witness but Him. No other hearer but Him. No other thinker but Him. No other knower but Him.

It means, the one who is indwelling in you and seeing, hearing, experiencing and so on is one only; there are no two. So, the '*antaryāmi brāhmaṇa*' does not say that there is a different 'Knower' other than you in your inner self. In addition, it asserts that you yourself are that 'Conscious *puruṣa.*' That which is referred to by everyone as the Conscious *puruṣa*, Destiny or any other name is not different from you. You alone are That. You inspire yourself !

If you do not agree to this, you will end up in another paradox. Let us say, for argument's sake, that 'Consciousness' which inspires you is separate from you. When it is admitted that He inspires you, it will imply that He is conscious and is also an independent entity.

If your inspiration is always coming from Him only, it means that you are dependent on Him for being conscious. In other words, you have to be an inert entity. What does your own experience tell you? Are you an inert thing or are you a conscious being? Undoubtedly you know that you are a conscious being. But your argument leads you to conclude that you are inert. Such a paradox has arisen because of your premise that a separate conscious entity other than you exists in you. It is obviously wrong.

Rama: Sir! Where is the rule that I should be inert and dependent if someone else inspires me? For example, a cowherd drives the cows for grazing. Here the cowherd is a conscious entity and so also are the cows. Similarly when an inward conscious being goes on driving me and directing me, I can also be conscious. What is wrong with that?

38. WHAT IS INDEPENDENCE?

Vasishta: Rama! What is wrong is the terminology. The problem would not have arisen if you defined the terms properly. What is a conscious entity? A conscious entity is one who can act independently. How does one understand independence? For carrying out any work, one needs a set of tools.When the tools are under his control, he is said to be independent. Otherwise, he has to follow the dictates of the tools. He will be at the mercy of the whims and fancies of the instruments; he will be dependent on them.

You are a king. You decide to wage a war against a neighboring king. Can you fight him alone ? You require the assistance from ministers, army commanders, soldiers etc. On your order, your commanders, military staff and soldiers advance forward and fight the battle. Everyone will then regard you as independent. They will say, “The king is very independent; he doesn’t depend on anyone’s advice. ”But suppose on your orders to march, the military officers, soldiers and others come back to you and plead with you to postpone the battle as they are all busy with festivals etc. Then, people will say, “The king is not independent. He has to follow what his soldiers say. He cannot make any independent decisions.” So Rama! One who has full control over taking action and also on the tools required thereof alone is independent. He who has such independent power of acting is said to be conscious.

Rama: Revered Sir! I am not convinced of the definition you give to the term ‘independence.’ You say that to have complete control over the tools of action is ‘independence.’ It does not look to me that the above definition is correct. I feel it is more appropriate to say that the one who works on his own independently without the need of any tools or implements is ‘independent.’

For example, we have the Sun. He does not take any help to illuminate the world. He shines on his own independently. Or consider God, the Creator. Whose help does he take for creating the five elements ? He carries out the creation independently. Only those deserve to be called as independent. It is not accurate to describe the kings and others who depend on a number of tools as independent. So, it is perhaps better, if you say that one is ‘independent’ if he can take action without assistance of any tools.

39. WHAT IS ACTION?

Vasishta: Rama! It is good that you are analyzing things in depth. But you should precisely define each word that you use. Taking the example of the Sun, you have come up with a new definition for the word 'Independence.' You said that the Sun shines independently. Tell me if "shining" by the Sun can be called an action at all.

We have to know what constitutes an action to answer the above question. Recapitulate all the varieties of actions in this world. Categorize them into groups. Examine what is the most common feature of all those groups of action.

If an action has taken place anywhere in this world, there's got to be a movement. It is called a vibration or *spandana*. In the absence of *spandana*, there can be no action. It must first originate in the mind and then through the mind it should flow to the organs and through the organs to the tools. Then only an action takes place. So 'vibration' is fundamental to action.

If shining is an action done by the Sun, the Sun must be vibrating to shine. But does the Sun move in order to shine ? If you take a bright lamp, does the lamp vibrate to shine ? You may say that the particles in the flame are moving. But that cannot be the valid answer in this context. When we cite an example for a particular thing, we have to consider it from the same perspective from which it is spoken. The examples of a lamp and the Sun are taken in the usual sense of those words and not from the angle of chemistry or physics. So the Sun or the lamp does not move particularly for the purpose of shining. Hence the Sun is not the 'doer' for the action of shining.

40. WHO IS THE 'DOER'?

Vasishta: Rama! Let us look at it from another angle. Let us for the sake of argument say that the Sun is the doer for the act of shining. A doer works with some internal and some external tools. A man using several tools cannot perform all the work at the same time. His efficiency varies according to the tools he uses. Therefore, sometimes, he may work efficiently and sometimes he may not. A doer in this world is inevitably governed by these conditions. If we accept your logic, it follows that the Sun's efficiency of shining is subject to his tools. But that is not at all what we observe in the world. Hence the Sun is not the 'doer' for the act of illuminating the world.

Rama: Whatever may be the argument, who else could be the doer for the act of illuminating the world if not the Sun?

Vasishta: Rama! Listen carefully. The question of an 'agent' for an action can come later. But first decide if 'shining' is an action. What I hold is that the shining of the Sun is not an action. Shining is the natural characteristic of the Sun. That's his nature.The nature of an object is different from its action. An action involves vibration. Quality will not involve any vibration. Suppose this pillar stands here; 'being' here is its nature and not an action done by it.

Rama: Why does then everyone say that the Sun shines, using shine as a 'verb'?

Vasishta: That's true! But such a usage is a conversational everyday expression by the people. It lacks depth in meaning. Do you know why such a usage gained popularity?

We need sunlight to see objects. But the Sun does not have anything to do for that. It will suffice if he is just there. The things will then shine and will be visible. If the sun is not there, these things will not shine and will be invisible. Strictly speaking, what we have to, therefore, say is that things shine in the presence of the Sun because it is his presence that makes them shine. Instead, people say in shorthand the Sun is shining. Though the present continuous form of the verb, 'to shine', is used here, there is actually no action done by the Sun. It is just the characteristic of the Sun to cause all the things around him to shine. He does not have to 'do' anything for that.

41. GOD IS INDEPENDENT

Vasishta: Rama! We are examining now what does independence mean. You said that to perform an action without the aid of any implements is 'independence.' You gave the example of the Sun and the Creator. We have just established that the Sun does not do any work at all. Let us now consider your second example, viz. the Creator.

You say God does the act of creation. How does he do it? The creation, sustenance and dissolution are carried out by Him in such a way that these will facilitate the experiencing of the fruits (of the actions) by different creatures in accordance with the actions done by them. That's what the '*śāstra*-s' (scriptures) also tell us. What does it actually mean? It means that God utilizes the fruits of the actions done by different beings as the tools for his creation. If there were to be no tools, there does not arise any need for Him to create, sustain and dissolve. Nor any possibility is there. So, even the God, the Creator, whom you cited as an example, is not acting in the absence of tools. If we adopt your definition, even the Creator is not independent. If God Himself is not independent, is it possible for anyone else to be independent in this world? If we formulate a definition in such a way that there is not even a single example for it, what good is that definition? Therefore, the definition given by you is not appropriate. We cannot say that only the one who works on his own without any tools is qualified to be called independent.

That's why the definition I have given is different. I said that he who uses tools, without being subservient to them and is, in fact, in control of them is independent. According to this definition, God is not dependent. It is because he uses the effects of the actions done by the creatures as tools for his work of creation, sustenance and destruction. However, he is not Himself affected by any of them. Hence the definition as given by me is not only appropriate but also valid.

Rama! We said that only the one who can act independently is a conscious entity. We then went into a detailed discussion on what constitutes 'independence' in action. Our discussion on who is conscious came up because we wanted to know what it is to be 'conscious' and what it means to be inert. As you may recall, the question on who is conscious or who is inert arose in the context of determining whether it is possible for two conscious entities to drive (or inspire) one another. This question in turn sprang up because you had entertained the notion in your mind that there was an '*antaryāmi*' (indweller) inside you.

You think that the indweller is separate from you and it is he who drives and directs every movement in you. , I said that if so the situation would be similar to a driver being at the steering wheel of a vehicle and that would make you equivalent to an inert vehicle. But you came up with the counter suggestion that the indweller would be like a cowherd driving the cows, both the cowherd and the cows being sentient entities.

At that point we went into a deeper analysis of the issues. Thus far we have finalized the definition of the terms involved like what it is being conscious and what it is being inert. Now we shall probe into the metaphor given by you.

42. YOU ARE THE 'DOER'

Vasishta: You have cited the example of a cowherd leading the cows. We have agreed that a conscious entity has to be an independent 'doer' of the actions. Does the cowherd guide the actions of the cow 24/7? Obviously no. The cow performs certain actions when the cowherd was driving it; it does also act by itself independently when there is no one directing it. Hope you agree this far.

You say that there are two entities - yourself and the '*antaryāmi*' (indweller) - in you. You are like the cow.The '*antaryāmi*' is like the cowherd. If so, you must be acting for a certain time on your own without being directed by the '*antaryāmi.*' But you say that the '*antaryāmi*' directs your movement 24 hours a day and all through the 365 days of a year. You assert that you have no other choice except to follow the dictates of the '*antaryāmi.*' If that were to be the case with you really, you cannot compare yourself with the cow. You are more like the vehicle – an inert thing. There is no escape for you. If you are constantly at the command of the '*antaryāmi*' who is separate from you, you cannot but be an inert thing.

But you are not an insentient or inert thing. Therefore, there is no separate '*antaryāmi*' (indweller) in you. You and the indweller are one and the same!

Therefore, Rama, there is no one else out there to drive your actions. You yourself are an independent 'doer,' the agent of your actions. Do not fall prey to the illusion of a 'destiny' controlling you. Go forward with your 'effort.'

Rama: Do you mean that one conscious entity cannot inspire another conscious entity?

Vasishta: Your question is like asking whether one lighted lamp will make another lighted lamp to illuminate!

To be 'conscious' is to be self-effulgent. It is like the glow of a lamp. If there is a need for a lighted lamp for another lighted lamp to glow, then that first lighted lamp will need some other lamp for its glow. It would become an infinite regress with no end, each lamp requiring another for its shining. It becomes meaningless to talk of the glow of a lamp. Hence, when it is accepted that a conscious entity is self-illuminating, the need for another entity to inspire it will not arise.

From whatever angle you may look at it, the conscious indweller in you is none other than you yourself. You are your destiny! Therefore, banish the fear of 'destiny.' Surge ahead with full 'effort' fearlessly.

43. TURNING THE MIND TO GOOD ACTION

Rama: Revered Teacher! Thanks to your meticulous exposition. My misconceptions about 'destiny' are dispelled.

Still, my mind, under the influence of the effects of my past deeds, formidably pulls me towards undesirable actions. I am unable to understand how to turn my mind towards meritorious actions. Kindly elucidate in detail the way I can go about it.

Vasishta: There is no big problem in this at all. Our mind behaves like a child.

अशुभाच्चालितं याति शुभं तस्मादपीतरत् ।
जन्तोश्चित्तं तु शुवित्तन्मुहूश्चतूयेद्गलात् ।।

aśubhāccālitaṃ yāti śubhaṃ tasmādapītarat |
jantościttaṃ tu śuvittanmuhūścatūyedgalāt ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 32

If the mother scolds the children, they go to the father. If the father scolds, they run to the mother. In the same way, the mind sometimes goes to the auspicious '*samskāra*-s' and at other times to the inauspicious ones. Suppose the mind goes to the inauspicious '*samskāra*-s' and gets rebuffed, it turns to auspicious *samskāra*-s. Similarly, if auspicious *samskāra*-s rebuff, it turns back to inauspicious *samskāra*-s. Here, getting rebuffed by the *samskāra*-s means that the prevailing conditions are unfavorable to them. When the conditions prove thus unfavorable for the *samskāra*-s, the mind swings immediately from one to the other side.

So, Rama! You examine yourself whether your mind is going towards the auspicious '*samskāra*-s' or otherwise. If it goes towards the good and auspicious ones, your task becomes easy. It will suffice, if you create an atmosphere around yourself conducive to the auspicious actions. The auspicious '*samskāra*' gets automatically strengthened. On the other hand, if the mind tends to go towards the inauspicious deeds, you have to work a bit hard. Working hard does not mean that you have to wrestle with the mind. What you have to do is to prevent undesirable influences and bad associations from coming near you. Surround yourself with auspicious elements (like listening to and studying scriptures) and develop association with noble people in order to strengthen your resolve to orientate the mind. Eventually, your mind will lose its tendency to go towards inauspicious '*samskāra*-s.'

A note of caution, however, is in order here. We have already said that the mind is comparable to a child. Suppose the parents trained the child to follow certain routines and habits.Then all of a sudden if they want the child to drop those habits and they want the child to adopt newly introduced routines, the child will be totally confused. It will neither be able to appreciate the new methods nor be able to resist the old ones.

Just as you cajole a child to give up the bad habit of, say, sucking the thumb through gentle nudging, you have to delicately coax the mind to learn new ways. After all, it has been so far habituated to function under the powerful sway of the past *samskāra*-s. Diverting it from the old undesirable *samskāra*-s to the auspicious ones now has to be handled with care and skill in slow steps. One should not try to bring about a change quickly through obstinate, rigid or masochistic practices.

समता सांत्वनेनाशु न द्रागिति शनेशनेः ।
पौरुषेणैव यत्नेन पालयेच्चित्तबालकम् ।।

samatā sāṃtvanenāśu na drāgiti śaneśaneḥ |
pauruṣeṇaiva yatnena pālayeccittabālakam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 33

Simply because one is asked to make a rigorous effort, one should not handle the mind crudely and tactlessly. Nothing should be done to wreck the mind. Observe this caution, and delicately divert your mind with tenderness towards auspicious *samskāra*-s.

44. GOOD THOUGHTS ARE THE ANTIDOTE

Rama: Revered Master! My mind sometimes goes towards the auspicious '*samskAra*-s' and at other times to the inauspicious ones. I am not able to assess which is strong and which is weak. What shall I do in such a situation?

Vasishta: A good question. You acquired the *samskāra*-s because of actions in the past. They have taken a shape; they are solidified. They are all the result of your own making. Whether they are good or bad, what you desire today are the auspicious '*samskāra*' only. Forget what you did or did not in the past. Do not muse over what happened. Develop in the now an environment that is conducive to auspicious *samskāra*-s. Do not join bad elements. Associate yourself only with noble people. You mold your thoughts as per the teaching of the virtuous people. Act according to their guidelines. Consolidate your good *samskāra*-s thus in the present. You consolidate your auspicious *samskāra*-s today and here itself.

वासनौघस्त्वया पूर्वमभ्यासेन घनीकृतः ।
शुभो वाप्यशुभो वापि शुभमद्य घनीकुरु ।।

vāsanaughastvayā pūrvamabhyāsena ghanīkṛtaḥ |
śubho vāpyaśubho vāpi śubhamadya ghanīkuru ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 34

We do not know whether you have accumulated the auspicious '*samskāra*-s' or the inauspicious ones. But we know for sure that whatever you might have accumulated, it was all due to your practice only. There is no doubt in that. So fall back on practice.

But this time, "*śubhamadya ghanīkuru*" – consolidate the good *samskāra*-s. As a result of the practices in the past, there is an accumulation of certain *samskāra*-s. They are giving undesirable results today. Instead of sitting there regretting what bad karma you had done in the past, realize one thing.We get the desired result sometime or other if we practice hard enough with determination.We can observe it to be so from our own experience. From such a realization, we will have confidence in the fact that we are bound to get favorable results at least in the next birth, if not immediately. You will not then think that you have been unnecessarily making an effort, just relying on the words of an old man, without being certain of the outcome. When you take up good actions without doubting, the actions advance much more smoothly. Then they will consolidate with formidable speed. So Rama !Leave every type of doubt and hesitation. Sincerely make the 'effort' to redirect your mind towards auspicious thoughts.

45. ARE THE *SAMSKARA*-S JUST A PRESUMPTION?

Rama: Teacher! What you say sounds very logical and reasonable. But, I noticed one weak link. You hold that we are now experiencing the results in accordance with our actions done in the past. Believing in that, you advise that we should not worry about the nature of works done in the past but proceed ahead with auspicious actions in the present under the hope that we will reap favorable results in our next life. But we have hardly any evidence that what we are facing now is the result of the actions done by us in the past. It is just an assumption. Based on that assumption we toil ourselves to perform all good actions in this life. Suppose our basic assumption itself is wrong. Then all the labor we put in based on the wrong assumption will be futile. Is it advisable then to put in hard effort under these doubtful circumstances?

Vasishta: Rama! It is absolutely advisable. I can definitely establish that what you experience today are the effects of what you did in the past. But I won't do that now. However, I shall respond to you based on your own logic. Let us say that our presumption to think that the current experiences are an outcome of our past actions could be correct or wrong.

Suppose our presumption is correct. The effort you put in now will yield favorable results. But if you entertain a doubt about our assumption, in spite of the assumption being correct, and you perform all actions with a desultory mind, nobody can save you from the disastrous outcome you will have to face later on.

Suppose the '*samskāra*-s' of today are the direct consequence of the past practices is untrue. Even then, if you observe good practices now, no harm is done. You suffer no loss.

Summing up, if you take up auspicious works now, you are not put to any loss either way. But if you don't perform good deeds now, there is a probability that you may have to reap the inauspicious consequences later on. Is it then worthwhile to take the risk by skipping the good practices now? A wise man will never gamble on this. He will perform good deeds only. So, I suggest that you should increase your effort in the performance of auspicious actions without any thoughts about the past *samskāra*-s.

I shall now prove to you that it is not a mere assumption on our part that our practices yield the fruits commensurate with the type of our actions. In fact, it is quite easy to do so.

यद्यदभ्यस्यते लोके तन्मयेनैव भूयते ।
इत्याकुमारं प्राज्ञेषु दृष्टं संदेहवर्जितम् ।।

yadyadabhyasyate loke tanmayenaiva bhūyate |
ityākumāraṃ prājñeṣu dṛṣṭaṃ saṃdehavajitam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Pakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 39

Normally we find that small children cannot get by heart advanced lessons. But these very kids are able to get by rote even difficult lessons through repetitious practice. Neither the children nor their parents nor their teachers ever doubted if practicing well would be fruitful or not. How come you get these doubts? There is no need to doubt the effectiveness of practicing.

Please listen carefully. As of now, you are unaware of the Absolute Truth. You are confused in your thinking because the auspicious and inauspicious *samskāra*-s got mixed up in you. Do not give importance to your thoughts. Follow the guidelines I shall provide you.

गुरुशास्त्रप्रमाणैस्तु निर्णीतं तावदाचर ।।

guruśāstrapramāṇaistu nirṇītaṃ tāvadācara ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 41

Adopt the path as laid down by the teachers and the *śāstra*-s as the true means of Knowledge. If you do accordingly, the inauspicious *samskāra*-s in you will be eliminated and the auspicious ones will prevail.

ततः पक्वकषायेण नूनं विज्ञातवस्तुना ।

tataḥ pakvakaṣāyeṇa nūnaṃ vijñātavastunā |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 9, Sloka 42

Your mind matures when only the auspicious *samskāra*-s remain. Then you will obtain the experiential Knowledge of the Supreme Self. When once you know the Supreme Self, *vijnāta vstunā*, the auspicious *samskāra*-s also drop off without any effort on your part. You will reach Absolute Bliss which is beyond both happiness and misery. That, in short, is the path you have to traverse!

46. HAPPINESS-BLISS

[Note: Sage Vasishta referred here to a blissful position beyond joys and sorrows. Happiness and bliss in common parlance are taken to mean the same. What does bliss beyond happiness mean?

A brief explanation for clarity :

Vasishta: The pleasures we get in this world are generally related to the senses. But a person says that he 'slept well' or 'slept happily' after experiencing '*suṣupti*' (deep sleep). During the deep sleep state (*suṣupti*) neither the mind nor the senses are at work. Yet he says he experienced happiness. We look for the recurrence of happiness from deep sleep in the same way that we wish for the repeated experience of sensory pleasures. So we can group the happiness that we get during the deep sleep with sensory happiness; but there is a characteristic difference between them. The happiness in deep sleep, as already noted, is not dependent on either the mind or the senses. In order to highlight this difference, it is given a different name - 'bliss.'

The happiness of knowing the Self is similar to that of deep sleep – not dependent on the senses and the mind. By the phrase "beyond the pair of opposites (joys and sorrows)," Sage Vasishta is pointing to the happiness of knowing the Self. The texts on Vedanta interchange the words 'happiness' and 'bliss'. But more often than not, the word 'bliss' is used as a technical term to refer to the bliss of knowing/being the Self. It is important to bear this point when the scriptural texts are studied.

47. TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE DISCUSSION

The principal issues that Sage Vasishta dealt with thus far are the action plan to be implemented by Rama and the likely results that would arise from practicing it. We have already presented the scheme conceived by the Sage in teaching the second chapter: *mumukśu vyavahāra prakaraṇa* (the chapter on the behavior and conduct of a committed seeker). Maharshi Vasishta planned at the outset to expound the importance of 'human effort.' The next topic was Self-inquiry.

The Sage discussed 'human effort' in great detail in six cantos (*sarga*-s) - from the fourth to the ninth. Now we are at the end of the ninth *sarga*. For a better understanding, let us briefly recapitulate the twists and turns it has taken.

People generally credit themselves if things work out to their expectations. If things turn out to be sour, they recall the adage that man proposes and God disposes. They remember God only when failure stares at them. So, the questions that arise first are what or who God is, and whether He has the power to act independently. Sage Vasishta opened his discourse addressing these questions.

A concept prevalent among people is that for some persons all things work out nice and smooth but for some others nothing goes as planned in spite of their capability and qualifications. The failures of the latter are attributed to the power of God and His will being not in their favor. So there is a common belief that there is a powerful God who is independent and failure or success depends on His grace.

Maharshi Vasishta raises an important question on the above concept. If there is an independent power called God, why would He be favorable to some and against others? He proves, after a thorough and meticulous analysis, that God is just a name given to the accumulated effects of the actions done in the previous births. He is very clear that there is no God. He convincingly establishes that one can overcome the effects of past actions with new actions done in the present.

Having successfully argued on the above lines, the Sage offers practical guidelines for an action plan so that auspicious effects accumulate. This is the summary of the discussion that had come up in the six *sarga*-s.

The Sage takes up, next, the subject of Self-Knowledge. As a prelude to that, he describes how this knowledge descended from the Creator, Brahma to himself. He begins with a discussion on the 'Laws of Nature' as an introduction to this topic.

48. 'NIYATI'

Vasishta: Rama! Observe this creation well. The earth, the Sun, the Moon, the planets, the stars and so on, move regularly in their specific paths at particular speeds almost without any deviation. A man begets a man. A cow begets a cow. The fire burns; the winds blow. The fundamental principles are never broken.

The fundamental five elements in Nature have been discharging their functions in an organized manner. We do not find a violation of the set pattern. Seasons unfailingly follow an order. Creation and dissolution also proceed in accordance with nature's laws. Such a process of organized movement of all the things in this creation is called '*niyati.*' Every scientist tries to find this '*niyati*' through his research. For example, when a medical scientist investigates a particular drug molecule, he will go deep into the matter about its properties and the effects. He tries to find the '*niyati*' of that molecule. The fact that a specific medicine works for a particular disease is the *niyati* of that drug. Once the '*niyati*' is discovered, one need not discover it again and again. He will administer that medicine whenever that specific disease arises. The disease gets cured. After finding out this *niyati*, not only the discoverer, but anyone using that medicine will get the same result. Only then it is said to be its *niyati*.

We find that from the minutest atom to the humongous cosmos, everything and every creature in this creation moves in accordance with a *niyati.* I wish to highlight this aspect.

Rama: Revered Master! From the way you have explained '*niyati*', it looked to me initially that God and '*niyati*' are the same. But, since it is now proved that God is nothing but the effect of the past actions of a being, it is not possible to think that *niyati* is the same as God. So, I feel that *niyati* points to the nature of the objects.

Vasishta: Rama! You are almost there. There is a slight difference.

यथास्थितं ब्रह्मतत्त्वं सत्तानियतिरुच्यते ।
सा विनेतुर्विनेतृत्वं सा विनेयविनेयता ।।

yathāsthitaṃ brahmatattvaṃ sattāniyatirucyate |
sā vineturvinetṛtvaṃ sā vineyavineyatā ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 1

The only reality in the universe is the Supreme Self. None of the objects perceived by us have true 'Beingness.' They appear to be existing with the borrowed Beingness of the Self. We say that certain objects are present in front of us in the now. Here, we are referring to their current existence using the verb 'are' in the present tense. In the future some more objects are going to be born. If we have to talk about them, we say that they "will be" here using the future tense "will be." Deliberate on the meaning of the two usages 'Are' and 'will be.' The act of 'being' is pervasive equally in both. The only difference is in 'time period.' Time cannot be defined in clear terms. If you remove the aspect of 'time', the two words 'are' and 'will be' lose the difference in their meaning. We call that existence or beingness. Beingness is "*niyati*'. I will illustrate with an example for greater clarity.

There is a lump of clay. A pot is made out of it. 'Pot comes out of the clay' is the '*niyati*' in this world. Now consider what '*niyati*' means. The clay is already there and the pot will be made out of it. This is the order of their existence in time. Clay is the cause and pot is the effect. This is the order of cause and effect. Clay is '*niyāmaka*' (that which gives a form) and pot is '*niyamya*' (one that takes a form).

When we say'clay is there', what is present there is really clay only. The present tense does not exist in that lump. When we say, 'the pot will be', what is going to be there after the pot is made is also clay only. The future tense does not exist in it. So, in this example, what is common in both periods of time - 'is' and 'will be' - is clay.

Similarly, when we call the clay, as cause, its role of being a cause, is the name we assigned to it; but what in fact is there is clay only. In the same way, when we say the pot is the effect, it is also a name we have assigned; what exactly is there is clay only. So, in both the cause and effect, the common thing present is clay only.

When we say clay is '*niyāmaka,*' what is actually there is only clay and when it is said, '*niyamya,'* what is there is also clay.So, in both of them, it is 'clay,' which is the '*niyati.*'

Rama! Now, reverse the order. '*niyati*' is what is common to all. Therefore, *niyati* is common to '*niyāmaka*' and'*niyamya*'; *niyati* is common to cause and effect; and further *niyati* is common to the present and future tenses. In our present example, '*niyati*' is clay.

You apply this principle to the effect called the world and the cause called the Self. What is common to both of them is 'existence. 'So, in the whole world '*niyati*' means only existence. That is the real nature of *brahman*. That is the reason I said to you earlier –

यत्नास्त्नितन् ब्रन्मतत्त्वन् सत्ता नियति रुच्यते

yatnāstnitan branmatattvan sattā niyati rucyate

Since the common factor in cause and effect, present and future tenses and '*niyAmaka*' and '*niyamya*' is '*niyati*', I added to the earlier verse

सा विनेतुर्विनेत्त्वन् सा विनेय विनेयता

sā vineturvinettvan sā vineya vineyatā

Since the same substance exists in both the cause and effect, if one is able to find out the relationship between the cause and the effect, the '*niyati*' in them or existence principle in them will be found to be unchanging as if etched on a stone.

Rama! I talked to you so much about '*niyati*' because there is an unchanging *niyati* between human effort and the result one gets from that effort. Some people do not understand the '*niyati*' in this manner and mistakenly think it to be the God or Destiny. I am glad you did not make that mistake. Remember the existence principle, '*niyati*' present in the human effort and its result. The implication is that there is no difference between cause and effect. The clay (the cause) and pot (the effect) are the same. There is no difference between them. Similarly, there is no difference in the effort you make and the result you get.

अतः पौरुषमाश्रित्य श्रेयसे नित्यबान्धवम् ।
एकाग्रं कुरु तच्चित्तं शृणु चोक्तमिदं मम ।।

ataḥ pauruṣamāśritya śreyase nityabāndhavam |
ekāgraṃ kuru taccittaṃ śṛṇu coktamidaṃ mama ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 2

Rama! Understand that the human effort and benefits (prosperity) are closely related like cause and effect. So, I advise you to focus your mind on (accumulating) auspicious *samskāra*-s.

49. SERMON BY BRAHMA

Vasishta: The mind and the senses have a common trait. They always crave for the comforts of this world or of the higher world. They cannot go beyond that level. But such comforts are far inferior and much lower than Liberation. So, you have to make every effort to gain control over mind and senses, such that my teaching on the means to attain liberation bear fruit. Lord Brahma revealed this great Knowledge to me at the beginning of *śvetavarāha kalpa* and I am passing it on to you, because all my sorrows were shattered with that revelation. If you listen to the preaching, you will also attain eternal bliss.

Rama: Revered Teacher! Kindly tell me all the details as to why Lord Brahma taught you this great Knowledge and in what way did you receive it.

Vasishta: Rama, as you know, *cidākāśa* is Consciousness-space, another name for the Supreme Self. I have explained to you earlier about *bāhyākāśa, cittākāśa,and cidākāśa*.

अस्त्यनन्तविलासात्मा सर्वगः सर्वसंश्रयः ।
चिदाकाशोऽविनाशात्मा प्रदीपः सर्वजन्तुषु ।।

astyanantavilāsātmā sarvagaḥ sarvasaṃśrayaḥ |
cidākāśo'vināśātmā pradīpaḥ sarvajantuṣu ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 11

cidākāśa pervades the entire creation. *cidākāśa* is the substrate for all the illusory manifestations in the creation. It has no extinction. What shines as the *jīvātma* (individual) within every creature is also *cidākāśa* only. Lord Vishnu is born out of *cidākāśa*.Who do you think Vishnu is? Vishnu is the ' *virāṭ puruṣa*' or the Cosmic personality who permeates equally the subtle as well as the gross fundamental five elements, the physical worlds that are born out of those elements, and also the beings living in those worlds. When we say that Vishnu is born out of *cidākāśa*, do not think that it is like a son being born from a father.

स्पन्दास्पन्दसमाकारात्ततो विष्णुरजायत ।
स्यन्दमानरसापूरात्तरङ्गः सागरादिव ।।

spandaaspandasamaakaaraattato viShNurajaayata |
syandamaanarasaapuuraattara~NgaH saagaraadiva ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 12

cidākāśa is like *spandāspandasamākāra*. s*panda* means vibration. Vibration is creation. *āspanda* is the absence of movement. It means dissolution. *cidākāśa* remains the same in the creation phase and also in the dissolution phase, that is, whether there is movement or not.

An ocean is an ocean whether there is a storm or not. When there is a storm, the sea becomes *spandamānarasāpūra*. That is to say that the waters are called the ocean throb. Waves raise and a tide develops in it. Are the ocean waters in any way different from the waters in a tidal wave? Though it is the same water in both, it appears to be different. Just as the tidal wave is born from the ocean, the *virāṭ puruṣa,* who is none other than Vishnu, is born from *cidākāśa*.

The heart of Vishnu blossomed like a lotus flower. At the center of the lotus was Mount Meru. The eight directions of the universe were the petals of that lotus. The stars were the anthers. Lord Brahma was born from that lotus. He is the leader of Gods and Saints who mastered the Vedas. Just as thoughts are created in our minds, Brahma created a huge throng of living beings. He created vast numbers of species including humans in a corner of an Island called Jambu Dweepa in a region called 'Bharathavarśa.'

The human beings were all afflicted by sorrows and diseases, because they were suffering from dyadic polar pairs of opposites. They had short life spans. Consequently, they were getting eliminated constantly. On seeing their plight, Brahma was overcome with compassion. Human beings had neither longevity nor intelligence. He thought over the matter to find a way to redeem their sorrows.

तपो धर्म च दानं च सत्यं तीर्थानि चैव हि
एतत्सृष्ट्वा पुनदवाश्चन्तयामास भूतकृत्

tapo dharma ca dānaṃ ca satyaṃ tīrthāni caiva hi
etatsṛṣṭvā punadavāścantayāmāsa bhūtakṛt

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Slokas 19-20

He initially created austerities with deep meditation for the upliftment of the humans. A close observation, however, revealed that not many could take advantage of it. So, he created *dāna, dharma, and satya*. Still people were unable to reach up to them. So, in order to ease their plight, he created sacred places and pilgrimage centers.

Brahma took a break after a time and reviewed the position. He found that his remedial creations -- austerities with deep meditation, *dāna, dharma, and satya*, sacred places and pilgrimage centers---could provide the human beings with only temporary merit and through that merit some short-term relief. He realized that those remedies would not be able to eradicate totally the misery of the humans and lead them to liberation which gives them permanent happiness. He felt that the solution could only be liberation.

संसारोत्तरणे जन्तोरुपायो ज्ञानमेव हि ।

saṃsārottaraṇe jantorupāyo jñānameva hi |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 22

Liberation is the only way by which people can achieve eternal bliss. Unless they transcend the birth and death cycles through liberation, they cannot hope for eternal happiness. The apparent world has to end for attaining liberation. He surmised that he had to think of a new strategy to help the people to be free from misery.

50. ORIGINATION OF SAGE VASISHTA

Vasishta: With those thoughts running in his mind, Lord Brahma created me using his mental powers. I was born of Him like a ripple taking birth from another wave. I was born with a water gourd (*kamaṇḍalu*) in my hand and the rosary (*rudrākśamāla*) on my neck. My father too has a similar water gourd and rosary. Immediately after I was born, I bowed to my father.

My father seated on a Lotus flower, took me into His arms with affection and seated me on a petal facing north. I was white in complexion, as the lotus petal. I was looking like the Moon riding over a white cloud. Me and my father looked alike, wearing deerskins.

I was readying myself to receive His blessings. But my father stiffened suddenly and threw a curse on me. He pronounced, “ My son! May you be overtaken by ignorance for a time! May your mind turn mercurial like that of a monkey! May ignorance enter you like the blot on the Moon!”

It was so sudden that it didn't even occur to me that I should find out the reason. I lost all my intelligence. I felt like an insolvent business man. I was drowned in an ocean of sorrow. I could not understand why I was subjected to such misery. A flux of wavering thoughts overtook me as it would happen with the worldly human beings. I agonized very much within myself over my sorrowful state. I did not ask for the cause from my father who was there beside me. I remained crest fallen and silent.

After a while, my father took me into his fold and said, "My Boy! Why are you sad? Why don't you ask me for the way out of the sorrow you are in? I would definitely reveal to you the means to be happy. May you be happy forever!"

Only then did I realize that I should talk to my father. I prostrated to my father and implored him to enlighten me how the misery in the form of this sorrowful world engulfed me. I asked him, "How has it come? How will it end? Pray tell me."

My father expounded to me in great detail the Knowledge of Self. After listening to those holiest of the holy words, I became pure like the Self Knowledge he imparted to me.

That was how I got back Perfect Knowledge. I regained my original Self (natural state). My beloved father, Father of every living creature in the universe, explained to me benevolently in the following words.

"My Son! I cursed you to ignorance so that you would ask me questions – questions related to enlightenment. My aim was to provide the Knowledge of Self through you to everyone in this creation. Prior to my teaching this Knowledge, you were like gold covered by a plaque. After gaining the Knowledge, you become pure gold. Son! Now proceed to Bharathavarśa in the Jumbudweepa on the planet Earth. Stay there and bless the people.

"The people of Bharathavarśa are completely immersed these days in conducting Vedic rituals and sacrificial rites. You have to teach the Supreme Knowledge to them with tact. I said 'with tact', because one should not antagonize the minds of such persons who perform the righteous actions but are steeped in a sort of *sattvic* ignorance. You have to preach to them on adopting the irritualistic paths so that they gradually develop detachment in their minds. You have to encourage them to question intelligently and turn them towards self-inquiry. Through the process of Self-inquiry, they should obtain true Knowledge and permanent happiness. That's the way you have to do this task."

Rama! My father ordained me at the beginning of the present *kalpa* as above. Thus it is my duty to preach Self-Knowledge to every eligible being till the end of the *kalpa*.

कर्तव्यमस्ति न ममेह हि किंचिदेव
स्थातव्यमित्यतिमना भुवि संस्थितोऽस्मि ।
संशान्तया सततसुप्तधियेह वृत्या
कार्य करोमि न च किंचिदहं करोमि ।।

kartavyamasti na mameha hi kiṃcideva
sthātavyamityatimanā bhuvi saṃsthito'smi |
saṃśāntayā satatasuptadhiyeha vṛtyā
kārya karomi na ca kiṃcidahaṃ karomi ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 10, Sloka 44

I have no duty to perform. I have no obligations to fulfill. I have nothing to obtain by performing action. I have already transcended the mind. I am here because I have to be here. My intellect is totally at peace; it has calmed down. Yet I take up certain actions depending on the mental needs of these ignorant people. I appear to them as though I am a 'doer' of the actions. But I do not do anything on my own volition. Rama! That sums up the way I am.

51. EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS OF IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE

Rama: Revered Sir! You said that, after noticing the pitiable state of the people of this world, your father had asked you to preach them the Knowledge of the Self in order to uplift them. Why did he have to do that? How did this educational program take shape? Will you please elaborate on that.

Vasishta: Rama! I have already spoken to you about the way my father created me and the work he had entrusted me. My father created great Rishis like Sanatkumara and Sages like Narada and others in a similar manner for the same work. He taught them The Path of Action, The Path of Worship and The Path of Knowledge extensively and directed them to work for the advancement of human beings.

Our work went smoothly during Kritayuga. But with the advent of Tretayuga after Kritayuga, there was a great change in the attitude of the people. Interest in following the actions and rites as prescribed in the Vedas had dwindled. The Maharshis deliberated on the developments and in order to preserve the righteous way of life, divided the earth into various kingdoms and appointed kings to rule over them. They penned several *śāstra*-s (scriptural texts) spelling out *dhārmic* principles (righteous action) with regard to the affairs of a state,the inter-relationships between the rulers and the ruled, societal laws etc. They had also written on the procedures of sacrificial rites for the fulfillment of the three human pursuits - *dharma, artha, kāma* (Righteousness, wealth and desire) for the guidance of the kings and their people. The people of the ṭretayuga were greatly benefited by the system of righteousness established by the Maharshis.

But in the course of a few thousands of years, the interest of people for righteousness gradually waned and desire for enjoyment increased. The rulers thus far used to consider governance as a divine worship. But slowly that thinking eroded. The rulers began to crave for power. They invaded the neighboring kingdoms and annexed them.

Battles were fought for territorial gains. As a result of the wars, both the royalty and the people suffered badly. As things started to deteriorate in this fashion, several of us Maharshis taught Self-Knowledge to the people by various means.

To start with, we imparted spiritual knowledge to the rulers.

अध्यात्मविद्या तेनेयं पूर्व राजसु वर्णिता ।
तदनु प्रसृता लोके राजविद्येत्युदाहृता ।।

adhyātmavidyā teneyaṃ pūrva rājasu varṇitā |
tadanu prasṛtā loke rājavidyetyudāhṛtā ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 17

For that reason, the Self-Knowledge came to be popularly known as the Royal Knowledge (*rāja vidya*) and Royal Secret (*rāja guhyam*). Many kings ruled their countries efficiently after obtaining the noble Knowledge, while maintaining their inner peace and happiness. Their minds stayed always calm and unperturbed.

52. DISCRIMINATORY WISDOM

Vasishta: You belong to one of such royal dynasties. You have already attained detachment (*vairāgya*). There are two types of detachment: *rājasika vairāgya; sātvika vairāgya*

Detachment that arises in the wake of severe tragedies is known as *rājasika vairāgya*. If the detachment arises out of discrimination without any tragic incident, it is known as *sātvika vairāgya*. Yours is undoubtedly *sātvika vairāgya*

तवानिमित्तं वैराग्यं सात्त्विकं स्वविवेकजम् ।।

tavānimittaṃ vairāgyaṃ sāttvikaṃ svavivekajam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 22

Rama, your detachment arose from your discrimination. It is based on truth. It is of *sātvik* nature. One who gets such a detachment is truly blessed.

Doesn't the entire world look like a huge magic for an observer with a critical eye?

श्मशानमापद दैन्यं दृष्ट्वा को न विरज्यते ।
तद्वैराग्यं परं श्रेयः स्वतो यदभिजायते ।।

śmaśānamāpada dainyaṃ dṛṣṭvā ko na virajyate |
tadvairāgyaṃ paraṃ śreyaḥ svato yadabhijāyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 28

Who would not be overwhelmed with detachment at the sight of burning corpses in a graveyard ? But in your case, it is the *sātvika vairāgya.* It does not happen to all. It is by grace only one gets this type of *vairāgya* An individual who has accumulated merit through good deeds over many births, who has performed many austerities, lived righteously, gave away in charities and visited many holy shrines would think of spiritual inquiry because the bad karma of such an individual would have ended as a result of the good acts. There may not be any specific reason for the arising of *sātvika vairāgya.* Both discrimination and detachment come together for such people. You fully deserve to be initiated into Self-inquiry.

External observers relate the detachment to some incident or other. But in respect of noble persons like you, a causal relation between an incident and the development of detachment is purely coincidental. For those who accumulated good karma through virtuous deeds for a long time and received the grace of the Lord, discrimination and detachment occurs suddenly.

People who fail to obtain discrimination stay immersed in rituals and keep moving up and down between heaven and earth like the spokes of a wheel. They can never attain the Supreme Self. It is not possible for anyone to transcend the misery in the world arising out of the polar pair of opposites like hot and cold, happiness and sorrow, plenty and penury in the absence of Self-Knowledge.

प्राज्ञं विज्ञातविज्ञेयं सम्यग्दर्शनमाधयः ।
न दहन्ति वनं वर्षासिक्तमग्निशिखा इव ।।

prājñaṃ vijñātavijñeyaṃ samyagdarśanamādhayaḥ |
na dahanti vanaṃ varṣāsiktamagniśikhā iva ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 41

Once the ultimate Knowledge dawns, one will not be affected by whatever hazards he may face in life. Can a forest fire originate when all the trees are drenched in a deluge of rain? Can the fire burn down a forest soaked wet in rain water?

53. THE TEACHERS AND THE TAUGHT

Vasishta: A wise man should strive to obtain such knowledge. How do you go about it? You should approach a learned man. He should be skillful in teaching. You should request him to teach the divine Knowledge. You should be able to grasp what he preaches. It is foolish to ask a person who has no Self-Knowledge. It is equally foolish to reject what a true Knower teaches. Rama! A sincere seeker like you should decide at the outset who is knowledgeable of the Truth and who is not. You should not run after each and every one to impart you the knowledge of the Self. These are the precautions to be taken by a seeker.

Now I will tell you the precautions to be taken by the teacher. The Knower of the Truth should not reveal the ultimate Knowledge to anyone who comes to him with a request. The teacher should satisfy himself first that the student can imbibe fully what is taught.

If necessary, the teacher should put the student to a test and only after it is established that the student has the discriminating capacity to comprehend the Truth, should the teacher reveal the knowledge about the Self. I have explained to you the requirements of the seeker and teacher.

The requirements I have just spoken about match you and me very well. You are good at questioning. I can provide you with all the answers. I shall impart to you the required knowledge. Please follow carefully what I say. A colored cloth will not be able to take another color well. But if we dye a white cloth, it will take on the color very well. You are like a white cloth. My instruction will definitely prove fruitful. Please listen to what I teach, think it over well, and reflect it in your mind. If any part of it is not clear, do question again; but do not waste it away."

54. SELF-INQUIRY

[Note: Maharshi Vasishta is now at the second topic in the curriculum drawn by him for teaching Sri Rama. He explained how the Knowledge of the Self had been passed on by his father, Brahma to him. He also commented on how a seeker should raise his questions and how a teacher should answer them. Yet, Sage Vasishta does not immediately plunge himself in teaching about the Self to Rama. You might wonder why it is so. After all, the student must be qualified enough to receive any new teaching. Suppose I pose a question to a Professor of Economics about cross-border financial transactions. The Professor will not immediately reel out a big lecture on the complicated international monetary regulations and the geopolitical policy implications. He will first assess my own level of knowledge in international finance. He will consider whether I have the necessary background and preparation to understand complex econometric principles. He will then suitably tailor his response to my question.

Maharshi Vasishta decided to teach Rama first the prerequisite qualifying conditions before instructing the actual Knowledge of the Self. In the present day world, an expert professor may refuse to answer a question if he finds out that the questioner does not have the necessary background to learn the subject matter. But the case of Rama was quite different. Rama was not only the favorite but also a worthy disciple for Sage Vasishta. So Vasishta briefed him first about the prerequisite (eligibility) conditions to be attained before taking up the study of the ultimate Knowledge and also about the qualifications that will help him in assimilating the Knowledge after learning.]

The Sage continued his discourse as follows:

Vasishta:

मनो हि चपलं राम संसारवनमर्कटम् ।
संशोध्य हृदि यत्नेन श्रोतव्या परमार्थगीः ।।

mano hi capalaṃ rāma saṃsāravanamarkaṭam |
saṃśodhya hṛdi yatnena śrotavyā paramārthagīḥ ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 56

Rama! Mere desire to know the Truth is not enough. The student's mind runs hither and thither once the teacher begins to explain the nature of Self. It is the mind that raises the doubts and it is the mind again that jumps from one thing to the other without listening. So it is essential that the mind should be explored first before taking up lessons on the Self. The mind should be trained well to receive the knowledge. The defects in the mind should be wiped out and it should acquire certain desirable qualities. People in general have to do two things to achieve this:

1. Keep away from the wicked; and
2. Associate with the noble.

We have discussed these two things earlier.

A seeker has to observe four other disciplines along with the above two. Since you are the son of an emperor, I shall explain to you in the language that you can appreciate.

मोक्षद्वारे द्वारपालाश्चत्वारः परिकीर्तिताः ।
शमो विचारः संतोषश्चतुर्थः साधुसंगमः ।।

mokṣadvāre dvārapālāścatvāraḥ parikīrtitāḥ |
śamo vicāraḥ saṃtoṣaścaturthaḥ sādhusaṃgamaḥ ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 11, Sloka 59

Rama! Comparing liberation to a fort, we may say that its entrance is guarded by four gatekeepers. They are:

1. *ṣama* (Calmness);
2. *vicāra* (Inquiry);
3. *santoṣa* (Contentment); and
4. *sādhusamgama* (Association with the holy)

It is necessary that we become friendly with the gatekeepers to enter the fort and gain an audience with the king. As gatekeepers change with their shift timings, friendship with all of them, ensures entry into the palace at any time. If not with all, we should be friendly with some of them, or at least one door keeper. We can get entry, whenever the friendly gate keeper is on duty. We will also be able to come in contact with the other gatekeepers through him.

Similarly, Rama, a person who aspires for liberation, will have to be friendly with the four‘gatekeepers’ namely mental calmness, inquiry, contentment and association with noble people. If it is not possible to do so, cultivate friendship with three, two or one of the four.

55. SHRAVANA, MANANA, NIDHIDHYASA

Vasishta: A spiritual aspirant should not let stupidity and inertness affect him. He should be peaceful in mind, gentle in manner and sincere in attitude. Being sincere would also mean to be straightforward and frank without any crookedness.

Rama! You are a good person. I know you have the ability to grasp anything you are told. I am willing to teach you. Yet, you should know the problems in listening and the cautions to be observed while listening. I shall elaborate them to you. Please listen.

रजस्तमोभ्यां रहिता शुद्धसत्त्वानुपातिनीम् ।
मतिमात्मनि संस्थाप्य ज्ञानं श्रोतुं स्थिरौ भव ।।

rajastamobhyāṃ rahitā śuddhasattvānupātinīm |
matimātmani saṃsthāpya jñānaṃ śrotuṃ sthirau bhava ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 12, Sloka 2

If your mind is full of passion (filled with *rajoguṇa*), it will keep shifting. If it is filled with indolence (*tamoguṇa*), it will not be inclined to accept anything. So, while listening to a teacher, both these qualities should be kept at bay. The mind should be filled with only pure goodness (*satvaguṇa*). One should have the confidence that by following Self-inquiry one will be free from all types of sorrows and he or she will attain supreme bliss. One should not approach Self-Knowledge with a sense of ridicule."

Sage Valmiki shifted at this point to prose instead of poetry. In this prose part and also in the verses that follow, he gave a flowing description of the problems one faces in worldly life. He explained the importance of an advantage in carrying out Self-inquiry. Finally, he summed up thus:

धिया दृष्टे तत्त्वे रमणमटनं जागतमिदम् ।।

dhiyā dṛṣṭe tattve ramaṇamaṭanaṃ jāgatamidam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 12, Sloka 21

After listening to the discourse on Self-Knowledge, one should reflect in his mind what is heard. With reflection, any doubt in understanding will be eliminated. After that, one should contemplatively meditate upon (*nididhyāsana*) the essence of the Truth that was understood. By this practice, all the contradictory misunderstandings will be eliminated.

After listening (*śravaṇa*) to the teaching (first phase), the seeker may still be unsure of accepting or rejecting the conclusions reached through reasonable argument. The reflection on what is heard (second phase) dispels this dilemma. Deep contemplative meditation or *nididhyāsana* (third phase) will help the seeker in eradicating the contrary or negative feelings about what has been understood. The contrary or negative feelings refer to the inability to accept what has been intellectually understood.

That means, the essence of Truth has been accepted in mind but the daily experience of life does not appear to conform to the Truth so understood. Meditation from the perspective of Truth can be called *nididhyāsana*. *dhiyā dṛṣṭe tattve* means understanding the Truth with discriminative intellect and a reflective mind. Once that has been achieved, all that is performed in this world, could be viewed as child's play.

ramaṇa maṭanaṃjāgatamidam means that, just as no dirt sticks to the minds of the children because of their play, the sorrows from transactions in the world do not affect the one who has the Knowledge of Self. That is why it is said,

धिया दृष्टे तत्त्वे रमणमटनं जागतमिदम् ।।

dhiyā dṛṣṭe tattve ramaṇamaṭanaṃ jāgatamidam ||

Rama! All the great men in this world live and interact with such an attitude. They did so in the past and do so even now. They neither wish for the good to happen nor for the bad to go. They do everything and also they don't do anything. They take part in all sorts of actions. They perform the works prescribed in the Vedas. They engage themselves in worldly functions too. But nothing sticks to them.

What does that mean? From the perspective of the onlookers, it appears as though they are involved in actions and reaping the results. But from their own viewpoint, they do nothing nor do they gain anything by their actions. They are forever in a blissful state. The only way for the mind to be in that position is through the Knowledge of the Self. So as long as a man lives, he should continue to inquire into the nature of Self. This is the *śravaṇa, manana,* and *nididhyāsa***.** Rama! There are three aspects to this process. They are:

1. What the *śāstra*-s teach;
2. What the s*adguru* preaches; and
3. One's own experiential realization.

All the three should merge. The merger of the three indicates the successful culmination of the process of Self-inquiry. When it is evident that your own experiential realization, what is taught by the *śāstra*-s, and what is imparted by the teacher is one and the same, you are a *Jeevanmukta* (Liberated right in this body). You conduct the affairs of this world as a *jeevanmukta* in the same way as Hari, Hara, and Brahma (theTrinity), Sages and Maharshis.

56. SHAMA

Vasishta: You may recall we talked about the four gatekeepers to the fort of liberation.The first of them is *shama*. *Shama* means calmness. Previously we discussed *shama* under *sAdhana catuShTaya sampatti* (The Fourfold Aids of Seeking). There *shama* was said to be the control over the inner organ. Here *shama* means tranquility, quietude.

शमेनासाद्यते श्रेयः शमो हि परमं पदम् ।
शमः शिवः शमः शान्ति शमो भ्रान्तिनिवारणम् ।।

shamenaasaadyate shreyaH shamo hi paramaM padam |
shamaH shivaH shamaH shaanti shamo bhraantinivaaraNam ||
Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 13, Sloka 52

The ultimate benefactor, liberation can be attained through only *shama* (tranquility). In a sense, there is no difference between *shama* and the Absolute state (*parama padam*). *Shama* is the Supreme Self. *shama* is auspiciousness. *shama* is Peace. *Shama* is the antidote for the illusion. Those who attain *shama* will be free from likes and dislikes, and anger and passion. His enemies become friends with him. If *shama* blossoms in the heart, he will be equal to Lord Vishnu. The bliss, that is not attainable even with the wealth of the three worlds, can be attained through *shama*. Various desires, mental problems etc. will vanish with *shama.* One, who has *shama*, will be endowed with a rare enthusiasm. He will easily understand the nature of the Self. When *shama* stabilizes in the heart, even the wildest of brutes will repose faith in him as they would in their mother."

Maharishi Vasishta glorified '*shama*' in 20 verses here. He then provided the definition for it in 9 verses.

श्रुत्वा स्पृष्ट्वा च दृष्ट्वा च भुक्त्वा घ्रात्वा शुभाशुभम् ।
न हृष्यति ग्लायति यः स शान्त इति कथ्यते ।

shrutvaa spRRiShTvaa cha dRRiShTvaa cha bhuktvaa ghraatvaa shubhaashubham |
na hRRiShyati glaayati yaH sa shaanta iti kathyate |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 13, Sloka 72

A man is said to be endowed with *shama* when he experiences things either through sight, sound, touch, taste, smell or in any other manner without feeling happy or unhappy irrespective of the fact that those things are attractive or repulsive, useful or useless, good or evil and so on.

A man is said to be endowed with *shama* if he is equanimous towards all beings, has no desire for anything in the future, does not reject either misery or happiness that comes upon as a result of his past *samskāra-s* and experiences whatever comes volitionally controlling his senses.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he remains calm, composed and unaffected within and also externally towards a person even after knowing that that person is cheating him, and continues with his practices and routines without being upset.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he remains calm and cool like the Moon without any perturbance in the mind even when someone near and dear is on the death bed or when there are celebrations in the family or fighting wars outside.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he remains unconcerned and unaffected even under the situations where there is scope for being joyful or sorrowful as if he is in deep sleep. How it could be possible. Does one enjoy the fragrance of the flowers in a garden when one is fast asleep? Or does the man in deep sleep get scared even if he is in a burial ground? One should stay as composed as in deep sleep, when he is even in an awake state.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he treats everyone around him with equal kindness and compassion making no difference whether the individual belongs to his group or out of his group, protagonist or antagonist, good or evil.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he is calm within though indulging himself in worldly activities, and remains neither overwhelmed nor allured by those affairs.

A man is said to be endowed with *śama* if he never feels identity with the body and other illusions even under a flood of hazardous disasters that could last till the end of the *kalpa*.

Sage Vasishta defines *śama* one more time, finally, in the 9th verse.

आकाशसदृशी यस्य पुंसः संव्यवहारिणः ।
कलङ्कमेति न मतिः स शान्त इति कथ्यते ।।

ākāśasadṛśī yasya puṃsaḥ saṃvyavahāriṇaḥ |
kalaṅkameti na matiḥ sa śānta iti kathyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 1, Sloka 80

A man is said to be endowed with *śama*if no impressions form on his mind consequent to the actions done by him. (Everyone has to get involved in some actions as a result of his past deeds. The actions so performed normally leave certain impressions on his mind).

Sage Vasishta defined '*śama*' by narrating the nature of the people who achieved calmness. According to Sanskrit grammar, *shAnta* is one who has '*śama.*' So in these definitions, every verse concludes with "*sa śānta iti kathyate*".

Sage Vasishta declared that the seeker who acquired '*śama*' to be far greater than one who performed sacrificial rituals, read *śāstra*-s, observed austerities, achieved virtuous qualities or acquired physical strength. He concluded his exposition on *śama* with a description of the final result of *śama*.

"Rama! When the Moon rises, moonlight spreads all over. Similarly, those people who achieved the quality of '*śama,*' not only enjoy the bliss by themselves but also fill their surroundings with waves of happiness. Noble people in the times of yore adopted the path of *śama* and attained liberation. May you also go by their path, attain *śama* and then the blissful state."

Maharishi Vasishta proceeded to talk about the second gatekeeper, '*vicāra*'

57. VICHARA

tātparya prakāśam, the commentary of Shri Ananda Bodhendra Saraswathi Swami (Shri ABS) on Yoga Vasishta is a very well-known and authoritative work. The Swami Ji highlighted a few significant points on *vicāra* at the beginning of this section. We shall provide a summary of his observations below.

Shri ABS classified *vicāra* into five types. They are:

1. *ardhānardhānubandhi vicāra*
2. *sārāsāra vicāra*
3. *heyopādeya vicāra*
4. *pramāṇatātparya vicāra*
5. *ātmatattvaparīkśā vicāra*

The commentator's division of *vicāra* into the above five types is based on a critical examination of the teaching by Sage Vasishta in the 14th *sarga.* The explanation provided by the Commentator helps us in understanding the forth-coming discourse between the Sage and Rama. So let us follow his argument.

1. *ardhānardhānubandhi vicāra*

'*ardha*' means an advantage as well as that which causes an advantage. The various processes approved in the scriptures like *vairāgya, śama, dama*, etc., can be grouped under *ardha*. These are the tools that help us to achieve the objectives of human pursuit (*puruśārdha*). Opposed to them are the '*anardha*-s' (harms). Examples for the *anardha*-s are: indulgence in worldly luxuries; living the life contrary to righteous principles etc. We should be mindful of the '*ardha*-s' and the '*anardha*-s' in all our actions. This inquiry is called the Inquiry into the facilitators and impediments (*ardhānardhānubandhi vicāra*).

2. *sārāsāravicāra*

'*sāra*' means that which has a value/worth. '*asāra*' is its opposite – a thing that is valueless/worthless. We have to analyze what is valuable and what is valueless in the perceived things. In the context of Self-inquiry, '*sāra*' is a cause for joy and '*asāra*' for misery. We can never experience comfort or joy in the world without a touch of sorrow. So, the comforts of the world are *asāra*. The comforts of the things in heavens or in Brahmalok (world of Brahma) may last a little longer, but also end in course of time. So, they are also *asāra*. Or consider our beloved spouse and children. In this world love is valued. Therefore, we may say that our spouse and children are *asāra* . But their bodies are impure (perishable) by nature. Even the way the bodies originate is despicable. Any of the physical bodies ultimately join the dust. Though the bodies may look attractive from outside, they are actually filled with the excretory and waste material. So, in whatever manner we weigh them, none of these would strictly deserve to be named as objects of *sāra*. The Supreme Self which is the cause for eternal bliss alone is fit to be called *sāra*.

3. heyopādeya vicāra

'*heyam*' means that which is not desirable and deserves to be rejected. '*upādeyam*' means which is acceptable and deserves to be received. Our objective is '*mokśa*' (liberation). What is the path we should adopt for its attainment ? Which tools should we discard ? Is it necessary to perform rituals as laid down in Vedas? Or do we have to worship any God or Goddess? Or, do we have to combine both the methods and also include the path of knowledge ? Is it needed to follow the three together? Will knowledge by itself lead us to liberation? Are the rest of the practices futile ? Mental churning on those lines is the inquiry into what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected (*heyopādeya vicāra*).

Luckily for some people, analytical thinking on the above three lines of inquiry may happen on its own without being spurred by the instruction of a teacher. Even if a seeker happens to be fortunate to take up the inquiry on his own, it is advisable that he takes the help of scriptures and teachers in order to firm up the way of his inquiry.

4. pramāṇatātparya vicāra

'*pramāṇa*' is the means to get real knowledge. '*tātparya*' means the essence of what the teacher likes to convey through the *pramāṇa*. The subject matter of our discussion is attainment of liberation (*mokśa*). We have to assess which *pramāṇa* to be taken up and which to be rejected? What are the right *pramāṇa*-- Vedas, *sānkhya, or vaiseśika* systems? Analysis on these lines is called the Inquiry into means of knowledge (*pramāṇa vicāra*).

We accepted the Vedas to be the means for the Ultimate Knowledge. Yet, we find the utterances of the Vedas to be very variable, sometimes even contradictory. What is it that they like to communicate finally? Do the Vedas say that the individual being (*jīva*) and the Supreme Self are different ? Or do the Vedas suggest that the individual and the Self are different in one sense and the same in another sense ? Do the Vedas establish beyond doubt that the individual and the Supreme Self are one and the same ? This kind of discussion is called Inquiry into means and the gist of the Knowledge (*pramāṇa tātparya vicāra*).

5. ātmatattvaparīkśā vicāra.

'*ātma*' means 'self.' Words like '*jīvātma', 'paramātma*' sound as if they are some unknown remote entities.I want to know who I am. For that I have to examine myself very carefully just like a gemmologist examines a precious stone. The specialist in gems undergoes a course of training under an expert. I should also seek the guidance of an experienced and knowledgeable teacher. I have to synthesize what the *śāstra*-s teach with what the teacher instructs regarding the world, the individual and the Creator. I have to investigate the nature of the three – *jīva, jagat* and *īśvara,* i.e. the individual, the world and the Creator Lord. I have to continue this probing till I reach a clear experiential understanding. This process of critical analysis is called the inquiry into knowing the essential nature of the Self (*ātmatattva parīkśā vicāra*).

The last two inquiries could proceed only under the guidance of a teacher and scriptures.

Maharshi Vasishta continues his discourse on Self-inquiry with the above five types of inquiry processes in mind. The Sage says:

Vasishta:

शास्त्रावबोधामलया धिया परमपूतया ।
कर्तव्यः कारणज्ञेन विचारोऽनिशमात्मनः ।।

shaastraavabodhaamalayaa dhiyaa paramapuutayaa |
kartavyaH kaaraNaj~nena vichaaro'nishamaatmanaH ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 1

"Rama! A seeker should introspect. It does not serve any purpose if he goes about this in a random fashion. He has to proceed in a systematic manner. He should first sharpen his intellect with the study of *śāstra*-s. Then he should purify his intellect by performing virtuous deeds. Then he should approach a teacher who is knowledgeable of the means to knowledge, what is to be known from them, and the tools to obtain the knowledge. He should have the triad in place, namely – a sharp brain, a pure intellect, and a knowledgeable teacher. With the help of this trio, he should sincerely take up his inquiry into the Self. This is the only way out for a spiritual aspirant desirous of obtaining liberation. If he persists with the inquiry, his mind matures in course of time. This is the only medicine available for the chronic disease of the cycle of births and deaths.

If you imagine this world to be a forest, thoughts on the objects of the world are the tender leaves. You should hack the forest at its root with the axe of "inquiry." If done so, the forest will not sprout again.

Our minds are drowned in sorrow and depression if a tragedy takes place in the family or when immense difficulties visit us. We become rudderless. Under those circumstances, Self-inquiry is the only torch that lights up the way for us.The bad tendencies (*vāsana*-s) in the mind will get dispelled and auspicious thoughts will populate it. Physical strength, intellectual power, resplendence, glory, favorable effects of past actions etc. will result from Self-inquiry.

Rama! Self-inquiry is a bright light. It helps us to discern the undesirable from what is worthy. The torch of Self-inquiry distinguishes the good from the bad. It is a wish-fulfilling tree. It fulfills all wants. It is a boat. It enables one to cross the sea called the world. It is a lion. It exterminates the arrogance of humans like a lion subdues the wild elephant. Rama! Not only the Knowledge of the Self, but also the kingdoms, enjoyments, heaven, liberation and all such things are dependent on Self-inquiry. Just as a dry gourd will not sink in water, people with Self-inquiry will not be drowned by afflictions and dangers.

The minds of foolish people are like jungles. Only weeds grow there – the weeds symbolize absence of self-inquiry. Once the weeds spread, they will not allow the plant of Self-inquiry to take root. The spines on the weed are the afflictions of the people.

Rama! Ordinary folk in this world are ever lost in slumber –the slumber of the absence of self-inquiry. Like sleep it shuts their eyes, like liquor, it inebriates them. A thinking man like you will not fall prey to such 'sleep' or such intoxication.

विचारविकला यस्य मतिर्मान्द्यमुपेयुषः ।
तस्योदेत्यशनिश्चन्द्रान्मुधा यक्षः शिशोरिव ।।

vicāravikalā yasya matirmāndyamupeyuṣaḥ |
tasyodetyaśaniścandrānmudhā yakṣaḥ śiśoriva ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 17

If a man becomes a dullard and stops self-inquiry, lightning (thunderbolts) from the sky will strike him. Poltergeists from nowhere will appear before him. His condition will be pitiable like that of a child.

A boy sees a ghost in darkness because of his ignorance and shouts that there is a ghost. It is nothing more than a figment of his imagination. The increasing fear arising out of the imaginary ghost might even endanger his life. When the same boy grows up and matures, he begins to question the source of the ghost, where did it come from, how did it come and so on. Once such an inquiry takes root in his mind, the ghost will not be seen again and nobody would know where it has disappeared. Everything in this world is more or less like that ghost. They appear quite enticing as long as proper inquiry is not made into them. So they are termed as 'uninvestigated treasures.' On inquiry, they will not be seen at all!

Rama! I referred earlier to the ghost imagined by the boy. Likewise, this world is also an imagination, no different from the ghost of the child. The ghost is born out of the ignorance of the child. The world is born out of the ignorance of the elders. If you seek the 'door keeper' called "inquiry," neither the ghost nor the world stays. An additional advantage you derive out of the doorkeeper, inquiry, is the eternal Bliss.

Rama! As a result of the Self-inquiry, ignorance gets destroyed and the mind calms down and stabilizes.

नाभिवाञ्छति नोज्झति *nābhivāñchati nojjhati*

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 30

(The one who reaches this position) will neither ask for anything nor refuse anything.

58. FALLACIOUS MIND

Vasishta: When Self-inquiry fructifies, the mind calms down and stabilizes. But a mind is said to be present only if there is '*spandana*' (throbbing / pulsation), because movement is the characteristic of the mind. Will it be fire anymore after the heat ceases? Similarly, if '*spandana*' disappears, will the mind be there? Can a man be alive without the mind?

This leads us to a strange conclusion that if one were to pursue in all seriousness Self-inquiry, and he succeeds in attaining the Self, he will cease to be alive !'*ātma vicāra*' or Self-inquiry is said to be only a 'process' for liberation. At the end of successfully completing the 'process' if the seeker dies, how can he get liberation? What purpose will the Self-inquiry serve ?

Let us find the answer. The mind of a normal human being is in a state of constant movement due to his experiences. There is no doubt in that. But the mind of a seeker who realized the Self through inquiry attains calmness, but does not die. It does not also pulsate.The mind is in a strange condition at that stage. The elders call such a mind, *"ābhāsa Citta"* (fallacious mind). Let me explain what a fallacious mind means through a story. This will help you understand better.

A farmer (F1) wanted to purchase seeds from another farmer (F2) for sowing in his own field. Farmer F2 was jealous of F1, but he didn't openly show it. So, farmer F2 had taken the money but did not deliver the seeds immediately. F2 asked F1 to collect the seeds the next day. Farmer F2, who offered to sell the seeds, slightly fried all the seeds in a pan that night. He then packed them in a sack for delivery. The next day, F1came, examined the seeds in the sack, and took the sack thinking that they were okay. After sowing, however, not even a single seed sprouted.

What happened here? The buyer F1 did not take the seeds blindly. He examined them before collecting the sack of seeds. The outward appearance of the seeds was quite satisfactory. But, because of the light frying, they lost the capacity for germination. Had the seller fried them completely, the buyer would have known the truth. But the seller did not do so. Such seeds are called *ābhāsa bīja* (fallacious seeds).

Likewise, the mind of the man who successfully completed his Self-inquiry has become *ābhāsa chitta* (fallacious mind). Its outward appearance is like a normal mind. But its tendencies (*vAsana*-s) have been burnt. As a result, it can't germinate any new 'projections' (*vikśepa*-s). But it still retains the form of a mind. Therefore, it cannot be construed to be completely dead. Hence, the man does not die.

We can note from this that death will not occur in the wake of successful completion of Self-inquiry. But how would such a man act in the world?

Such a noble man, who is now free from bondage, casts an indifferent look at all the things in this wide world. He will neither think that some of the objects of the world as holy and real nor he discards and rejects others as unholy and unworthy of experience. He neither gloats over the things he gets nor does he remain sad or miserable for things he doesn't get.

The people of the world may consider the behavior of a liberated man to be very strange. He appears to be unaware of anything in this world as though he is in deep sleep. But he is not ignorant. He appears as if he is wandering in his own dreamy world. He does not carry any impressions which project a world of their own or *vāsana*-s in his mind. He is not allured by the happenings in the world like the others do.

न च शाम्यति नाप्यन्तर्नापि बाह्येऽवतिष्ठति ।
न च नैष्कर्म्यमादत्ते न च कर्मणि मज्जति ।।

na ca śāmyati nāpyantarnāpi bāhye'vatiṣṭhati |
na ca naiṣkarmyamādatte na ca karmaṇi majjati ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 33

He neither renounces nor adheres to action. He does not worry about the past. He accepts everything as it happens. He does not get agitated. He does not sit idle either. He lets things work as per their true nature. He is like the deep ocean.

Rama! Some great men who are yogis get liberated right in this life and continue to live with *ābhāsa citta*. Finally, they attain liberation without the body (*videha kaivalya*). Self-inquiry leads one to such a magnificent state.

So every man should introspect every day

Everyone weighs carefully the pros and cons of all his/her actions in his daily dealings. Even the rulers analyze issues thoughtfully. A king will perish if he arrogantly fails to evaluate all things in times of crises like wars. A wise king discusses with the ministers and the commanders of his forces and then only will take decisions. When kings act with such care and caution, ordinary people pursue proper analysis. When the worldly affairs themselves require so much of meticulous examination, is it any exaggeration to say that seeking the Supreme bliss would demand much more serious inquiry? So, Rama! Self- inquiry starting with the questions *koham kasya ca samsāra* (Who am I? For whom is the bondage of this world) is a must for everyone.

The Vedas have two parts in them. The first part is concerned with action (*karma kāṇḍa*). It teaches about righteous behavior and conduct. It explains what sort of actions will yield what type of results. The second deals with the Knowledge of the Self, *brahma jnāna* (*jnāna kāṇḍa*). The second part is also called Vedanta or Upanishads. A wise man should examine both the parts. For a person lost in the darkness of ignorance, inquiry is a beacon of light.

Rama! Even if we have vision, the eye cannot work in the dark. If the light falls directly on the eye, we cannot see. Even though there is adequate light, the eye cannot see if there is some obstruction in the path of its vision. But the eye of inquiry is free of any of these defects. Inquiry can proceed in darkness as well as in light, and even when there is an obstruction.

विवेकान्धो हि जात्यन्धः

vivekāndho hi jātyandhaḥ

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 41

Therefore, I hold that a man who is not inquisitive is as good as congenitally blind!

Of the investigations and inquiries, the inquiry into the Supreme Truth is the noblest. It is sanctified. It should not be given up even for a moment. The grief one would get from a lack of inquiry far exceeds the unhappiness that comes from a severe disease. Lack of inquiry is worse than consuming poison or being chopped by a knife. You may wonder why I sayso.The sorrow that comes from a disease or from swallowing poison or being cut by a knife is confined only to this birth. But the unhappiness that comes for want of analytical thinking will haunt you for several lives. That is the reason I am emphasizing it so much.

I already explained to you what constitutes an inquiry. Let me repeat it once again.

कोऽहं कथमयं दोषः संसाराख्य उपागतः ।
न्यायेनेति परामर्शो विचार इति कथ्यते ।।

ko'haṃ kathamayaṃ doṣaḥ saṃsārākhya upāgataḥ |
nyāyeneti parāmarśo vicāra iti kathyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 50

There is no use crying over who I am and how this bondage of the world stuck to me. One must find out the answer to these questions with reason and logic. The reason and logic should be based on proper means of knowledge. This entire exercise is *vicāra.*

We find people in this world often resorting to an inquiry into what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected (*heyopādeya vicāra*). Based on this, they decide on what is useful for them. One who has interest in Self-Knowledge should also use this method. Attainment of Self-Knowledge gives him tranquility (*śama*). Rama! I have explained at great length in the last section about *śama.* Inquiry is the only way to achieve *śama.*

सफलता फलते भुवि कर्मणां
स्फुटविचारदृशैव विचारिता

प्रकटतां किल गच्छति उत्तमाम् ।
शमवते भवते च विरोचताम् ।।

saphalatā phalate bhuvi karmaṇāṃ
sphuṭavicāradṛśaiva vicāritā

prakaṭatāṃ kila gacchati uttamām |
śamavate bhavate ca virocatām ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 14, Sloka 54

Rama! You have already attained *śama* to some extent. Develop it further!

Now I shall explain to you the third gatekeeper - *'santoṣa.'*

59. SANTOSHA

Vasishta*: santoṣa* is contentment. It is the quality of a man who is not upset by the ups and downs of life. He does not feel sad in his mind when unfavorable things visit him. He remains equanimous towards good and bad happenings. There is no greater happiness than attaining this state. The mind will be at rest through contentment. It is the shortest way to liberation. For him who achieved *santoṣa*, even Lordship over the entire world appears to be of no value. Luxuries are like poison to him. He will not have any desire for those which he does not get nor exult over what he has. The chief enemy of *santoṣa* is ambition (*tṛṣṇa*).

पौरुषेण प्रयत्नेन तृष्णां सर्वत्र वर्जयेत् ।।

pauruṣeṇa prayatnena tṛṣṇāṃ sarvatra varjayet ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 15, Sloka 14

Make every effort to curb ambition and desire. *santoṣa* gives strength to the mind. Once he gets that strength, all types of resources will surround him like the attendants around a king.

samatva (Equality) is the friend of *santoṣa*. When there is a sense of equality of all, there comes a glow in his face. Anyone looking at him also feels content.

समतया मतया गुणशालिनां पुरुषराडिह यः समलंकृतः ।
तममलं प्रणमन्ति नभश्चरा अपि महामुनयो रघुनन्दन ।।

samatayā matayā guṇaśālināṃ puruṣarāḍiha yaḥ samalaṃkṛtaḥ |
tamamalaṃ praṇamanti nabhaścarā api mahāmunayo raghunandana ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 15, Sloka 20

Rama! All virtuous people approve of the quality of equanimity. It's a true embellishment to all human beings. Even Gods and saints bow down to a man who shines with *samatva* (equality).

60. SADHU SANGAMA (Association with Holy People)

Vasishta: Association with holy people is of greatest help for redemption from this world. If association with noble people is compared to a tree, discretion is its flower. The fruit that comes out of it is liberation itself. If you are associated with noble people, even a desert will be as good as a city, because the presence of noble people is like having relatives nearby. With good people around, even dangerous situations turnout to be worthy resources. It is so because noble people help one gain discrimination through every experience.

विवेकः परमो दीपो जायते साधुसंगमात् ।

vivekaḥ paramo dīpo jāyate sādhusaṃgamāt |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 16, Sloka 6

Association with good people enhances the discriminative ability of the person who has already gained discretion.

दरिद्रेणेव मणयः प्रेक्षणीया हि साधवः ।।

daridreṇeva maṇayaḥ prekṣaṇīyā hi sādhavaḥ ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakharana, Sarga 16, Sloka 12

Just as a prospector looks for precious gems, a seeker should search for holy people.

Maharshi Vasishta thus described the four gatekeepers that can lead the seeker to liberation. At the end, he summed up his teaching as follows:

संतोषः परमो लाभः सत्सङ्गः परमा गतिः । विचारः परमं ज्ञानं शमो हि परमं सुखम् ।।
चत्वार एते विमला उपाया भवभेदने ।

saṃtoṣaḥ paramo lābhaḥ satsaṅgaḥ paramā gatiḥ | vicāraḥ paramaṃ jñānaṃ śamo hi paramaṃ sukham || catvāra ete vimalā upāyā bhavabhedane |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 16, Slokas 19,20

Of all the benefits that a man can ask for, *santoṣa* is the greatest.
Of all the means a man can adopt, association with the noble people is the greatest.
Of all the knowledge a man can obtain, Self-inquiry is the greatest.
Of all the comforts a man can obtain, *śama* (tranquility) is the greatest.

These four are the best ways to end the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*).

Rama! Usually a cause is related to an effect in this world. But in respect of the four means we described here, anyone can be the cause for the other three.This is the unique feature of these four means.

If one gets hold of '*santoṣa*', it could bring about association with noble people, Self-inquiry, and tranquility. For some, *santoṣa* is not so easy. If they associate themselves with virtuous people, it brings about *santoṣa*, *ātma vicāra* and *shama*. For some *ātma vicāra* is easy. Its pursuit bestows them contentment, association with the virtuous people and tranquility. For some, *santoṣa*, *ātma vicāra* and *satsangama* are not possible. Practice of calmness gets them happiness, association with noble people and Self- inquiry.

एकोऽप्येकोऽपि सर्वेषामेषां प्रसवभूरिह ।

eko'pyeko'pi sarveṣāmeṣāṃ prasavabhūriha |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 16, Sloka 22

Rama! Strive to adopt at least one of the four qualities through your effort after conquering the mind. If you are unable to achieve at least one of the four, it does not make a difference whether you are a god, an angel, a man or a tree."

[**Note:** When Sage Vasishta equates gods, men and even trees, as above with respect to the methods of seeking liberation, we may understand that one's state of birth or status is immaterial for the attainment of liberation. Whatever be the birth, one can try to obtain the Knowledge of the Self. Further, however great the state of birth may be, if one does not make an effort, Knowledge of the Self cannot be achieved.]

"Rama! I shall summarize my words -

A man's mind is like a forest. The trees are his thoughts.The tendencies arising out of the past actions flow in two channels in the forest of your mind. One of the streams is auspicious; and the other is inauspicious. It depends entirely upon your effort as to which stream is nurtured and which one is allowed to dry out.

यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु ।।

yathecchasi tathā kuru ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 16, Sloka 34

Please do as you like. In my opinion, inauspicious courses should be dessicated and dried up. You are an auspicious minded person. You should develop and nurture the auspicious channel with your effort.

61. STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Vasishta: Rama! The *śāstra*-s (scriptures) on diverse subjects are taught to all the royalty. However, the essence of the Knowledge of Self should be revealed only to the highly deserving men like you who possess intrinsic discretion.

I propose to impart to you this knowledge in a well structured manner. So, I shall provide you with an outline of the plan of my teaching. No purpose is served by keeping a lighted lamp in front of a sleeping person. If it is kept in front of an awakened individual, even if he does not wish, objects will be clearly seen. Those, who have a natural discrimination like you, will certainly attain liberation by merely listening to my treatise on liberation. The illusory world will be shattered. This monograph on *mokśa* will contain 32,000 verses. They will be divided into six chapters. Each chapter will have many interesting and illustrative stories.

The stories will demonstrate through examples what we derive theoretically using logic. I shall deal with this subject in the following chapters -

I) *vairāgya prakaraṇa*:

Plants will not grow well where there is no rain. Yet, if you water them regularly, they will grow well. Similarly, if one listens the *vairāgya prakaraṇa* carefully and reflects on what is heard, however deeply one may be involved in the worldly desires, he will certainly develop detachment. There are 1500 verses in this chapter.

II) *mumukśu vyavahāra prakaraṇa*:

I explain here the methods that can be adopted by a spiritual aspirant desiring liberation. There are 1000 verses in this chapter.

III) *ūtpatti prakaraṇa*:

The birth of this world takes place in the same way that dreams arise. This is a mental kingdom. This is the city of Gandharvas. This is a wall painting without a wall. This world has as much truth in it as there is heat in the flames in the painting on the wall.

Another example. A scholar lying flat on his back on a Park bench in the open took a mouthful of water. He blew it up into the sky. Sprinkles of water shot up into the air and scattered. The scholar jumped with joy saying that huge water lakes sprang up in the sky. The origination (*ūtpatti*) of this world is no different. I shall explain about the origin of the world in the *ūtpatti prakaraṇa* . There are 7000 verses in it.

IV) *sthiti prakaraṇa*:

In this chapter, I shall explain the real state of this world which appears so extensive. I shall show how it is sustained. I shall demonstrate that everything perceived therein like the seer-seen, experiencer-experienced, the subject-object are all in fact nothing but the Supreme Self and that Consciousness is the substratum that supports it. There are 3000 verses in this chapter.

V) *ūpasama prakaraṇa*:

Our illusory differentiating perceptions like that and this, he and she, I and you etc. will all subside by carefully listening to the content of this *prakaraṇa*. If the things explained here are fully assimilated, the entire world will look like a water color painting washed away in rain. A sincere seeker who ingests thoroughly what is explained in this chapter will achieve liberation in this life. Even if he wears the body, he will not be troubled by the infatuations of this world. One who ponders deeply over the contents of this chapter will understand that the reality of the world is as much as that of a horn of a hare i.e., non-existent. This chapter is very sacred. It has 5000 verses.

VI) *nirvāṇa prakaraṇa*:

This is the last chapter. It is the largest of all. If one understands this well, all his desires will evaporate and he obtains the most auspicious position - *nirvāṇa*. Though possessed of a body, he will become bodiless. There are 14,500 verses in it divided into two parts."

62. ENTIRE UNIVERSE IN A GRAIN

Vasishta: There are many beautiful verses describing the illusory nature of the world at the end of the 17th *sarga* in the second chapter. We shall discuss the concepts behind them in relation to the origination, sustenance and dissolution of the world when we take up the respective chapters later. However, mention may be made here of one particular verse which resonates well with the modern scientific theories on atoms.

परमाणौ परमाणौ चिदाकाशः स्वकोटरे ।
जगल्लक्ष्मीसहस्राणि धत्ते कृत्वाथ पश्यति ।।

paramāṇau paramāṇau cidākāśaḥ svakoṭare |
jagallakṣmīsahasrāṇi dhatte kṛtvātha paśyati ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 17, Sloka 49

The Absolute (i.e the Supreme Self) called *cidākāśa*, creates a hole, i.e. space, in Itself and within the subatomic particles of it, creates thousands of worlds, sustains them and perceives them.

This sentence conveys a very profound concept. The traditional commentators explain the meaning as follows:

We can see within a small mirror even a huge mountain. Why only a mountain, we can see the entire sky. So nothing is impossible when unreal things like the reflections in a mirror are perceived. Likewise, within every subatomic particle of *cidākāśa*, several *brahmānda*-s (universes) can be imagined to exist as a part of the game of illusion.

When we examine the verse from a modern scientific viewpoint, we obtain a more significant meaning which appears to be more in conformity with the theory that is proposed in the Yoga Vasishta.

The concepts of outer space, mental space and *cidākāśa* were already discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter on the origin of the world, the concepts introduced here will be explained more extensively. It is suggested earlier that *cidākāśa* is a dynamic force. What human beings think of as their consciousness is the *cidākāśa*. (The word *cidākāśa* means Consciousness-space).

Modern science has established that subatomic particles like the neutrons, protons etc. within the atoms are not static, but are under constant movement. They behave sometimes as particles and sometimes as waves. Let us analyze the aforesaid verse keeping the scientific knowledge in view.

paramāṇau paramāṇau cidākāśaḥ svakoṭare |
jagallakṣmīsahasrāṇi dhatte kṛtvātha paśyati ||

Word Meaning:

paramāṇau paramāṇau	=	within everysubatomicparticle
svakoṭare	=	in its womb
cidākāśaḥ	=	Consciousness-space is there.
saḥcidākāśaḥ	=	That consciousness-space
kṛtvātha	=	After creating
jagallakṣmīsahasrāṇi	=	Thousands of worlds
dhatte	=	Wears them/ lives in them
athaḥ	=	and
paśyati	=	Sees them (It is also the Seer of those worlds)

.

The gist of the verse is that the basic substance at the core of every subatomic particle is consciousness-space. It is consciousness alone that modulates itself into thousands and thousands of universes. The verse also explains that some of the material in those worlds is inert and some is conscious. It says that "I"am a conscious entity and the individual who thinks that "I" am the conscious seer is also part of that consciousness. This understanding of the verse complements the modern scientific knowledge. It is also very much in line with what the Upanishads teach us. For example, we have from the *chāndogyopaniśad*:

हन्तमा मिमास्तिस्रो देवता नामरूपे व्याकरवान इति

अनेन जीवेनात्मनानुप्रविश्य सेयं देवतैक्षत

hantamā mimāstisro devatā nāmarūpe vyākaravāna iti

anena jīvenātmanānupraviśya seyamdevataikśata

chāndogyopaniśad, VIII – iii - 2

The basic consciousness created the fundamental five elements and thought. It means that the Goddess of consciousness thought thus: I enter into these five elements – as an individual *(jīvātma)*. I shall imagine names and forms for them.

Our question was who could compress the energy in the cosmos and create matter in the form of subatomic particles and atoms ? We have an answer from the above mantra of the *chāndogyopaniśad*. It answers that the basic consciousness which is the substrate created the particulate matter and it itself entered into that matter.

The verse from Yoga Vasishta as well as the findings of modern science are in conformity with the above mantra. In the next sarga the concept is further elaborated and we shall examine it in greater detail there.

After briefly introducing a few topics thus, Sage Vasishta closed his dialogue in the following words:

Vasishta: "Rama! I shall elaborate on all of the above issues in the last chapter on *nirvANa*. I developed this scriptural treatise based purely on logic.

अपि पौरुषमादेयं शास्त्रं चेद्युक्तिबोधकम् ।

api pauruShamaadeyaM shaastraM chedyuktibodhakam |

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Sloka 2

It teaches the principles of logic and is developed entirely on the basis of logic. Even though it is prepared by a*puruSha* (i.e. not *apauruSheya)*, you can very well accept it as a valid *pramANa* – means to the Knowledge of the Self.

I repeat this because you may get a doubt on why only the Vedas, not written by men, should be accepted as the means to the Knowledge of the Self and not any text authored by a man. To put your doubts to rest and convince your mind that Vedas are a valid *pramANa*, I am going to teach you the content of the Vedas, along with relevant logic and illustrations.

A logically presented argument coming even from a child should be heeded. An illogical statement, even if uttered by Lord Brahma, should be rejected. If one were to refuse to accept a logically derived conclusion, he is no different from the person who refuses the sweet waters of the Ganges and takes in the brackish water from the well just because it was dug by his ancestors.

Rama! First listen to what I teach. Then, deeply reflect on it. By virtue of this, skill develops in you before you obtain the Knowledge of the Self. It will enable you to understand even the most complex issues easily. It gives you access to more knowledgeable scholars. Eventually avarice and delusion will wane and you will experience the Knowledge.

Often spiritual aspirants are seized by doubt whether it is the karma (action) that causes one to be born or it is the birth that causes one to do karma – which comes first ? They are caught in the dilemma of whether destiny rules or human effort. From a study of this manual on *moksha*, all such doubts will come to rest.

The attention of a seeker who sincerely takes up a study of this treatise, travels towards noble people and scriptures and he feels comfortable in their company. He will be blessed by the attainment of the unbound Non-dual Supreme Self.

We made a reference earlier to two additional verses that discuss subatomic particles,energies and generation of matter. We shall now take up those two verses.

जगतां कोटिलक्षेषु यावन्तः परमाणवः ।
तेषामेकैकशोऽन्तःस्थान्सर्गान्पश्यत्यसङ्गधीः ।।

परमाणौ परमाणौ सर्ववर्गा निरर्गलाः ।
ये पतन्त्युत्पतन्त्यम्बुवीचिवत्तान्स पश्यति ।।

jagatāṃ koṭilakṣeṣu yāvantaḥ paramāṇavaḥ |
teṣāmekaikaśo'ntaḥsthānsargānpaśyatyasaṅgadhīḥ ||

paramāṇau paramāṇau sarvavargā nirargalāḥ |
ye patantyutpatantyambuvīcivattānsa paśyati ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Slokas 27, 29

Meaning - there are billions and billions of cosmos. In them, there are trillions and trillions of atoms. In every atom, there are billions and billions of creations. Any one listening to my teaching of the treatise on Liberation with a detached mind will be able to know those creations.

[Note: While discussing the implication of this verse earlier, we explained that at the center of every atom there is consciousness-space and that consciousness is the base for the entire creation. In the 27th verse Sage Vasishta gives the meaning directly and clearly. He adds interestingly – "asanga DhIH." By this, he means to say that the one who recognizes consciousness thus will get liberated from the enticement of worldly life.]

Now let us see the 29th verse –

परमाणौ परमाणौ सर्ववर्गा निरर्गलाः ।
ये पतन्त्युत्पतन्त्यम्बुवीचिवत्तान्स पश्यति ।।

paramāṇau paramāṇau sarvavargā nirargalāḥ |
ye patantyutpatantyambuvīcivattānsa paśyati ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Sloka 29

Sage Vasishta explains in this verse how a man with a detached mind, views the world. Maharshi says that he sees the origination, sustenance and dissolution taking place in every atom continuously just like we see the waves in the sea rise and fall without any break.

Rama! One who listens to this 'Manual on *mokśa'* will come to know many secrets of liberation. Yet, he will be like any ordinary man. When spoken thus in eulogistic and contradictory words, some may wrongly conclude that the Knowledge of Self is difficult to understand. This scripture is an enchanting classic text.

The illustrative examples in it shine with astral brilliance. What's needed is only a little familiarity with the language to understand it easily. If one studies this text diligently and assiduously, he/she would not need to observe any other rigorous practices of austerities, deep meditations, worship, rituals for liberation.

You might wonder why I have been insisting on making an intentional effort! That is because, all human effort goes towards the eradication of the dualities of likes-dislikes; acceptable- rejectable, desirable-undesirable; happiness-sorrow and so on. Once you are free of the pairs of such orthogonal opposites, liberation through listening to the manual on *moksha* is easier than piercing a tender leaf with a sharp needle.

Do not conclude from the above that you should study this magnificent work only after you get rid of the attachments and hatreds etc. That is not what I mean. You will realize the effects of this knowledge even if you are involved in experiencing the world provided your experiences are as per the stipulations of the scriptures and sanctioned by the tradition and also you continue to keep company with noble people and conduct yourself righteously.

63. ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Vasishta: Rama! I shall now briefly touch on the illustrative examples, the technical terminology and the method I propose to follow in my discourses. An illustrative example normally will be an analogy. But the examples I give will be more than that. They help to convey the final meaning for easy grasp. The Sanskrit word is *dṛṣṭānta* which can be divided as *dṛṣṭa* + *anta* = what is seen (i.e. which is said) + the ending, (i.e. the final expectation from the teaching).

Suppose a trader has the habit of falling asleep while sitting at the cash counter. We wish to impress on him that it is not only bad but also dangerous. In order to convey it, we say that it is like sitting on the top most branch of a tree and taking a nap there. There is no similarity at all between the top most branch of the tree and the shop. Yet, sleeping on the last branch of the tree and sleeping at the cash counter in the shop are equally dangerous. From this the trader will understand that sleeping in the shop is dangerous. That, in fact, is the expected take home message from our teaching.

What is purported to be taught through a metaphor? That "one should not sleep in his shop." The reference to the sleep on the topmost branch has made him grasp what we wished him to understand finally. So sleeping on the topmost branch of the tree is a metaphor.

Suppose we say that your face resembles the Moon. Here the Moon is the object to which a comparison is made. The face is the subject of comparison. There are some common qualities between the subject and the object of comparison. There will not be a cent percent similarity. When we say that your face is like the moon, it only means that the face is pleasant to look at. It does not mean that the face is round like a dinner plate. So it is important to note from which point of view a comparison is made.

One should not construct an analogy based on an unimportant quality of a thing. So the grammarians insist on us to watch two principal defects when a comparison is made. They are: Failure in the comparison and contradiction in the comparison.

Suppose a man says that "houses can be built without walls like castles in the air." 'Castles in the air' is only a poetic expression and no such buildings actually exist. So there is really nothing to be compared to a house without walls. It is an example of 'failure' in comparison. Therefore, not only the analogy but also whatever the speaker is trying to convey through that analogy stands invalid.

Suppose one says that "Fire is like an ice cube."When you question him on the meaning, he will reply that it is difficult to hold either of them in your hand. However, the incongruence in the comparison is too glaring and needs further clarification. If an analogy is constructed using diametrically opposite things, it is called a contradiction.

Therefore, analogies have to be constructed without such defects to convey the meaning properly. Further, in a logical text like the present one, both the subject and object of a comparison should be either causes or effects. For example, take the statement: 'we learn new things from a study of scriptures like we see things in the house under the light of a lamp.' In this instance the words scriptures and lamp are the subject and object of comparison respectively. Both are causative. The light of the lamp illuminates things. The light from the scriptures illuminates the knowledge of the unknown. The effects are visibility of the things and attainment of knowledge. Both the effects are comparable. Thus it forms a good analogy. Violation of these rules makes the analogy meaningless.

But there is a huge problem when it comes to the teaching of the Knowledge of theSelf. None of the objects in this world can ever be compared to the Self. All the objects of the world as well as all the analogies developed based on these objects are unreal. They are the effects. They are never the cause. In contrast, Self is Real and It is ever the cause. Self is never the effect. So it is not admissible to compare any of the worldly objects which are effects and unreal to the Self which is ever the cause and the only Real thing. If no analogy can be constructed, if no comparison can ever be made, how is it possible to teach the Knowledge of the Self ?

64. RELATIVE COMPARISONS

Vasishta: While teaching the Knowledge of the Self, the principle of relative comparisons are admitted.

Relatively speaking, clay is the cause; pots are the effects. Relatively speaking again, clay is more permanent than the pot. Hence clay is real; pots are unreal. Similarly, from a relative point of view, gold is real and causal to all the ornaments that are made out of it. The ornaments are unreal and are the effects. Taking recourse to such relative comparisons, we propose that the Supreme Self which is the substrate for the entire universe is eternal, absolutely Real and causal to all things.

In the example we have given, clay or soil are the objects of comparison. The subject of comparison is the Supreme Self. But some people mischievously argue that clay and gold being the effects of the Supreme Self, they cannot be used as the objects of comparison to the Self

which is always the cause and never the effect. Such a comparison would be a violation of the rule that the subject and object in a comparison should both be either causes or effects. But speaking relatively, clay and gold do possess causality (*kāraṇatva*).

Though from the absolute point of view clay and gold are effects, we may use them metaphorically in a relative sense. After all, we know that when we make a comparison, there will not be one hundred percent congruence in the qualities of the subject and the object used in the comparison.Therefore, from the relative causality point of view, it is not wrong to compare *brahman* to clay or gold.The factor of being the cause is satisfied in this comparison. So we may say that it is not an inappropriate metaphor. The comparison stands with respect to the principal issue being pointed to.

An oft quoted metaphor in the Vedanta circles is mistaking a rope to be a snake in twilight. It is said that *brahman* is similarly seen as the world under ignorance. The rope is said to be the substratum. The snake is called a superimposition. Likewise, *brahman* is the substratum and the world is superimposed over *brahman*. The comparison is made between the rope and *brahman*.We are aware that *brahman* is Real and the rope is an unreal object. The comparison is not made to demonstrate 'reality.' The point being illustrated through this metaphor is the aspect of substratum. Both the rope and *brahman* are substratum. So, the comparison is made between the two.

Both the snake and the world are super impostions. That is the common characteristic between them. Unable to grasp this point, some people ask whether the rope is immanent and whether it feels blissful like *brahman*. One should respond to such people with a counter question. If their face is compared to the moon, does it mean that their face is pockmarked like the moon's surface or if their face is veiled by clouds. That would be a befitting reply to them.

Rama! Till the subject intended to be taught is clearly grasped by the student, we have to accept the difference between the teacher, the taught and the knowledge at a relative level and then proceed with the instruction. If one were to deny the relative distinction, no method is available for teaching. A teaching will be fruitful only when the validity of the principle of relative comparisons is accepted.

65. AWAKE AND DREAM WORLDS

Vasishta: From a relative perspective, we say that the awake world is no different from the dream world. Some people object to this statement. They question our logic. They posit that we negate the reality of the wakeful world by equating it to a dream, and then proceed to say that the awake world is unreal and only *brahman* is really real. So they question how the awake world is comparable to the dream world at all. Let me elaborate on this.

Everyone says that the dream world is false irrespective of the fact whether he is a highly knowledgeable scholar or a layman. What is the basis to say so? The dream world is said to be false because the things seen in a dream did not exist before the dream nor do they continue to exist after the dream is over. They disappear as suddenly as they appear. We may infer from this that all such objects are unreal if they neither exist in the past nor in the future, but suddenly appear and disappear. Therefore, the dream world is considered unreal.

Let us take another example. Suppose a magician threw a few seeds of an apple tree on the rocky ground in front. In no time, we see an apple plant growing there. Even before we express our wonder, that plant bears a few ripe juicy red apples. The magician plucks a couple of the fruits, cuts them and offers them to all the spectators. Everyone enjoys the nice flavor and the sweetness of the apples. While the children sit surprised at the sudden appearance of the apples, the elders describe it all as an illusion and that the apple fruit and tree are unreal.

The magician does not agree. He goes into the kitchen, picks up a couple of apples. He again cuts them and distributes them to the spectators. He asks them after they ate the pieces whether they were also false.The spectators say that those apples were from their own house and hence they are real whereas those produced by the magician were unreal. The magician objects to their argument. He questions them how the apples coming from his tree could be unreal when they ate them and also experienced their flavor and sweetness. The magician is not convinced on how the people could say that the apples from their kitchen can be real whereas the apples grown by him are unreal.

The elders argue that the apples in the kitchen were brought from a farm, they were collected from the trees grown there, the trees were planted quite some years ago and now they came to fruition.It is not like the apple tree of the magician suddenly coming out of a few seeds sprinkled on the rocky floor in front. No seeds can germinate on a rocky surface and even if they germinate, the plant cannot grow so fast and yield ripe fruits ready to eat. Therefore, they declare that the apples of the magician are untrue.

The juggler persists. He questions them how they could deny their own experience of eating and relishing the taste of the apples produced by him if they were unreal. The spectators do not relent. They aver:“Look here! Even if we ate, your tree and its fruits are false because a tree growing on rocky soil and growing up so suddenly cannot be true.”

What is the moral of the story? For anything to be born, there has to be a proper reason behind the event and also suitable enabling conditions. Adequate time and space should also be available. If these conditions are satisfied, one would call it to be a real object. If an object is born without any cause and even if there is a cause, if it is born in an unusual place and within an unusually short time, even if such an object is seen, it is considered to be false. This is what is generally agreed to by all the people of this world.

Generalizing the above, we may say that an effect is real only if it originated under favorable conditions like the existence of the contributing factors like time-space-causation. If the time, space and causation are not conducive to its origin, the effect is unreal, in spite of the fact that the effect has been perceived.

Let us examine the dream world on the basis of this definition.

We may witness mountains, rivers, elephants and so on in a dream. Where did all these come from? What are the causal factors for their origin? Who has made them in such a short time? We have no answers for these questions.

It is clear from this analysis that, even though those objects appeared in the dream, they are not real because the contributory factors like time, space and causality were not conducive. Thus, we have essentially two reasons to say that the objects of the dream world are unreal. The reasons are:

1. The objects seen in the dream did not exist in the past, they do not exist in the future; but they appear to have suddenly born and disappear equally suddenly.

2. They seem to have originated even though the contributory factors like time, space and causation were absent.

Now let us consider whether the awake world is real or unreal based on the two criteria we have just arrived at.

The objects seen in the wakeful world are made up of the fundamental five elements (*panca bhūta*-s). But where from the five elements arise ? We do not know the answer for this. Though we know the properties of the five elements to some extent, we do not know anything about the causal factors for the genesis of the five elements. We have to admit that the five elements are unreal. If the constituent five elements are false, the worldly objects made out of the five elements cannot be real. We deduced that the dream objects were unreal based on the criterion that the contributory causal factors were unavailable. Application of this principle to the wakeful world objects shows that the wakeful world objects also are unreal. Thus, based on this criterion, we can say that the dream world and wakeful world objects are equally unreal.

We noted that the objects in a dream appear suddenly and also disappear suddenly. If we take a critical look, we find that the objects in the awake world also are of the same type. When we go to sleep, the huge solid world just disappears. When we open our eyes the next day, we do not see the world of yesterday anymore. For example, there were buds on the trees around us when we went to sleep. But when we wake up the next day, we find that the trees are full of flowers. Since the difference between the two situations is not much, we are unable to notice the change. As a matter of fact, we do not know where this world goes when we are asleep. Thus, it can be said that the wakeful world suddenly goes as soon as we fall asleep and it suddenly appears when we get up from sleep. Sudden appearance and sudden disappearance are common with respect to both the dream world and the wakeful world.

We are thus able to recognize unequivocally that the dream world and the wakeful world are totally comparable. So, we hold that:

अवस्तु पूर्वापरयोर्वर्तमाने विचारितम् ।
यथा जाग्रत्तथा स्वप्नः सिद्धमाबालमागतम् ।।

avastu pūrvāparayorvartamāne vicāritam |
yathā jāgrattathā svapnaḥ siddhamābālamāgatam ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Sloka 58

66. EPHEMERAL AND EMPERICAL REALITIES

Vasishta: We discussed the comparison between the dream world and the wakeful world from the point of view of a layman. Let me now add to it a technical argument.

There are two ways by which objects originate in the world. (1) A pot is made from a lump of clay. There is clay in the pot. The cause is clay; the effect is pot. Therefore, the cause follows into the effect. Expressed in a different way, the reality in the cause is not different from the reality in the effect. It means the reality in the lump of clay is clay. The reality of the pot, after the lump has changed to pot, is also clay. There is no difference between the two. (2) Take the instance of mistaking the rope to be a snake. We see an object, the snake. How is it generated? What caused it ? Just like clay-ness continues to be present in the pot (as walls of the pot), does the rope-ness continue to exist in the snake? Just as the shape of the lump of clay changed, does the form of the rope change when it is seen as the snake ? Such a change has not happened. Hence the 'reality' present in the cause, i.e. the rope, is different from that in the effect, the snake. These two are totally different types of realities. This is the second way how things originate in the world.

In general, people call a thing to be real if the cause and the effect have the same level of reality as in the lump of clay and the pot. If the effect and the cause have different levels of reality, the effect is labeled as unreal. Everyone agrees that the snake in the rope is an unreal object. This is nothing fabricated by me; it is something accepted by all.

Let us now extend this principle to the dream world. What is the cause for the dream world? We have to say that the mind is the cause. Has the mind entered into the dream objects like the mountains etc.? We have to say no. Hence the level of reality of the mind and that of the dream world are different. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that the dream objects are unreal. But do people apply this principle to the awake world?

स्वप्नाभत्वं च जगतः श्रुते शास्त्रेऽवबोध्यते ।
शीघ्रं न पार्यते वक्तुं वाक्किल क्रमवर्तिनी ।।

svapnābhatvaṃ ca jagataḥ śrute śāstre'vabodhyate |
śīghraṃ na pāryate vaktuṃ vākkila kramavartinī ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 1, Sloka 61

Rama! One has to study the scriptures and find out the reality of the cause and effect and the inter relationship between the realities of the two. Only then can one decide whether the awake and dream worlds are the same or different. The words *vākkilakarma vartinī* come one after the other. But is it possible to utter all the words together at one time? Likewise, I shall proceed gradually in my discourses, step by step, giving you ample illustrative examples.

When we use certain metaphors, as I already indicated, there will not be one hundred percent similarity between the subject and the object of comparison. When we say that both the awake world and the dream world are comparable, we do not mean that they are exactly the same. There are differences between them and I shall tell you what the differences are.

The reality of the dream world objects is known as the 'ephemeral' (or dream world) reality. That means the objects of the dream world exist as long as they appear in the dream. The reality of the awake world is known as the 'empirical' (or transactional) reality. The awake world objects are not permanent; but they appear again after we wake up from sleep. The dream world objects do not appear again after the dream is over. This is one of the differences between the awake and dream states.There is yet another difference. Most usually, the experiences we have during the awake state are causal for the dreams we get. The day time experiences leave their trace in the mind and they get modified slightly and reappear as the dreams. On this count, the awake state is the cause and the dream is the effect.

It may also so happen that some of the dreams we get indicate the experiences we are likely to have in the future. For example, a person may dream that he was on a journey and he would face some danger en route. He would not care for the dream and proceeds on his trip. And some unexpected accident happens during the trip. If things turn out similarly two or three times, he will modify his day time activities depending on the dream experience. If not everyone, many people have such experiences in their life. Viewed from this perspective then, the dreams can be said to be the cause and the awake world is the effect !

67. COMMONALITY IN THE DREAM AND WAKEFUL WORLDS

Vasishta: Thus the wakeful and dream states mutually support each other – each can be the cause or the effect of the other. Earlier on we said that a comparison could be made between two objects only if both of them are causes or effects. Is a comparison between the wakeful state and the dream state valid or not?

We said previously that the two states are comparable from the view point of their impermanence. Further, we have established that the level of reality of the cause for the dream objects and the level of reality of the wakeful state objects are different. The reality of the wakeful state objects similarly differs from the reality of their cause. We shall for the present not go into the proof of this. We shall do so in the next chapter when we discuss the origin of the perceived world. We will take it for granted for now. This fact then informs us that the dream state and the awake state are similar because in both cases there is a difference in the level of realities in their respective causes and effects.

There are certain differences between the wakeful and dream worlds. But the most significant is the similarity between them. Unless their similarity is brought out, it is impossible to establish the transiency of the wakeful state world. There is no better analogy.

68. *Brahman* IS IMMUTABLE

Vasishta: Some argue that the world originated from *brahman* in the same way the ornaments come from a nugget of gold. They would even cite the following mantra from the *shruti*:

यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञातं
स्याद्वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं मृत्तिकेत्येव सत्यम् ॥

yathā somyaikena mṛtpiṇḍena sarvaṃ mṛnmayaṃ vijñātaṃ
syādvācārambhaṇaṃ vikāro nāmadheyaṃ mṛttiketyeva satyam ||

chandogyopaniśad - V1 – 1 - 4

Meaning: If you know the lump of clay, you have known all the pots and pans that are made out of it.

The One *brahman* is the material cause for the world just like gold is the material cause for all the ornaments or clay is the material cause for all the pots and pans.

But the above argument misses the fact that the *śruti* itself, states at several places that *brahman* is neither the cause for nor the effect of anything. *brahman* is said to be "*ekamevādvitīyaṃ"* (It is one only; there is no second). *śruti* also states that *brahman* alone is. *smṛiti*-s (mythologies) also hold that *brahman* is immutable (*avikāryam*). It would contradict these Vedic sayings if one says that *brahman* has undergone a change to become the world like the lump of gold undergoes a change to become many ornaments. So, it is not possible to say that *brahman* has changed to become the world.

There is another problem in saying that *brahman* changed to become the world. A lump of gold will give raise to gold ornaments only. Clay pots and pans do not originate from gold. *brahman* is a conscious entity. Therefore, if *brahman* undergoes a change, only conscious objects have to come out of it and not inert things. There is no escape from this. In whatever manner one may argue, it cannot be agreed that *brahman* undergoes any change. Hence, the analogy of gold ornaments arising out of a lump of gold is not applicable to *brahman* . But then the question arises why and how the Vedas used the metaphor of a nugget of gold or a lump of clay for *brahman*. Our reply is that it is not always possible to assume one hundred percent similarity between the subject and the object when a comparison is made. Since *brahman* happens to be the substrate of the world, though it is immutable, Vedas used those analogies.

Rama! Let me give you another example. Suppose we say that this gemstone glitters like a lamp. Does it imply that that precious stone is a wick sitting in oil? Obviously not. Similarly, when *brahman* is compared to gold, one cannot insist on extending the comparison to say that *brahman* undergoes change. It would merely be a stubborn attitude to hold so. It would be called -

अपवित्रैर्विकल्पितैः ।। *apavitrairvikalpitaiḥ* ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Sloka 68

69. SINGLE SENTENCE

Vasishta: We find some statements in the Vedas where *brahman* is compared to a nugget of gold. We also have sentences in the Vedas that vouch that *brahman* is not a cause for anything. Which statement should one accept? For correct interpretation, we have to necessarily depend on scholars who have understood the truth.

अस्माकमस्ति मतिरङ्ग तयेति सर्वशास्त्रैकवाक्यकरणं फलितं यतो यः ।
प्रातीतिकार्थमपशास्त्रनिजाङ्गपुष्टात्संवेदनादितरदस्ति ततः प्रमाणम् ।।

asmākamasti matiraṅga tayeti sarvaśāstraikavākyakaraṇaṃ phalitaṃ yato yaḥ |
prātītikārthamapaśāstranijāṅgapuṣṭātsaṃvedanāditaradasti tataḥ pramāṇam

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 18, Sloka 70

None of the Vedic statements fail to be a means to knowledge. Neither there can be pecking order in them declaring one to be more significant than the other. The apparently mutually contradictory sentences have certain core meanings. That core sense is called '*eka vākya*.' I shall explain this with an example.

A father found that his son had not been preparing himself well for the examinations. He chided the boy saying how he could sleep when the final examinations were fast approaching. Realizing his mistake, the boy forsook his sleep and worked hard studying late into the nights every night. The father once again admonished his son for not getting enough sleep. He reproached him saying how the boy could understand anything if he did all night outs continuously.When the boy slept through the nights, the father scolded him for not being attentive to his studies. When the boy stopped sleeping and spent the entire nights on studies, then also the father took him to task.

Clearly two mutually contradictory statements are made by the father. On one hand he scolded his son for sleeping and on the other hand he pulled him up for not sleeping. Does this mean that his father was illogical? Why should the father speak in two opposing terms? He did so because there is a common principle behind both sentences. His father's intention is that the son should spend as much time as possible on his studies with as little time as possible on sleep, while taking care to see that his health and ability to grasp what he studied are not jeopardized. That is the gist of the father's reprimands.

When we consider the contradictory sentences with a spirit of understanding and maturity, we will be able to arrive at the gist of what is being pointed out by those opposing sentences in the Vedas. The boy could not make sense of what his father was telling him because he lacked maturity. But experienced people can easily understand the purpose behind them. *eka vākya* shows the convergent meaning of two opposing statements.

Rama! We should be able to achieve such single meaning for the apparently contradictory sentences in the Vedas. We should know what that *eka vākya* is. Experienced Vedic Pundits lose no time in arriving at that single meaning. However, those who do not have adequate experience develop a theory based on dry logic.They declare those statements that are in conformity to their understanding as the primary sentences and those that are against them to be not primary. Philosophers like Kapila, Kanada and so on in the past established their theories and systems operating only in that way. People like me did not do so. We do not have an axe to grind. We had no theory or concept that we had conceived or arrived at with our own logic to protect and propagate. We researched for the common meaning of the contradictory sentences in the Vedas basing ourselves on the experience of the elders. We understood the convergent principle, practiced it and ultimately found out for ourselves the truth through our own experience.

Rama! What we say here is not dry logic. It is not based on conceptual models and deductive methods. Ours is an argument based on the correct means to the knowledge. What we say is based on the gist of what the Vedas teach and what is learnt experientially. Whatever we are going to teach you with illustrative examples and citations from the Vedas should be understood from such a position of convergence.

Now a word about metaphors.We have discussed quite a bit on suitability of analogies and metaphors, how they should be and whether we could find an analogy for *brahman*. In fact, it is not wise to discuss so much on this issue. It is better to focus on the principal aspects of our topic rather than fritter away our energies on peripheral matters. Even if some connected subsidiary points arise, sensible people absorb the relevant point and proceed with the main issue. One should not continue on marginal concerns. When a hungry person is given food, he will devour the food with complete concentration. He will not get into irrelevant details like where from the ingredients were procured, whose recipe was adopted, was the food cooked on flaggots or coal and so on. It doesn't speak of intelligence.

70. FROM THE MOTHER WITH LOVE

Vasishta: The great Vedic statements like '*tattvamasi*' hold the key for that Knowledge. *tattvamasi* comprises actually three words – *tat, tvam* and *asi*. *Tat* means 'that.' *tvam* means 'you.' *asi* means 'are. 'What the Vedic statement says is 'You are that.' What do we understand by that sentence? Honestly nothing! In order to comprehend its meaning, we have to first know what *tat, tvam* and *asi* mean. This process is called 'investigation into the word - meaning of *tat, tvam* and *asi*.' In effect that's what our primary objective is.

We do not mind from whatever angle the investigation into the word-meaning of the three words is taken up. In order to aid in the investigation of the word-meaning, elders have provided us with a few metaphors. We will take the help of those metaphors to proceed further rather than being stuck at the level of the metaphor itself.

Knowledgeable people, when they give us an illustrative analogy, will be aware that there will always be a certain element of unreality in the cited example. Say, a child has got highfever. The doctor gives a medicine which is very bitter. The child refuses to take the medicine.

The mother tells him that if he takes the medicine, he will get strong muscles like his brother and will be then able to vanquish his brother in a fight. The little boy drinks the medicine in spite of its bitterness, keeping his mind on getting strong muscles so that he can beat his brother. The mother is projecting the strong muscles as the result. She gives the example of his brother for that. As a matter of fact, there is no causal relationship at all between growing strong muscles and the bitter medicine. But the little boy is stubborn. The mother loves the boy. Her desire is that the boy should take the medicine.

But does that not attract the blemish of speaking untruth to the mother? The answer is no. After all, the mother spoke in that way in the best interest of the child. Moreover, the boy will be able to grow muscles once the fever goes away. So in an indirect way, one can say that there is a connection between administering the medicine now and later development of muscles by the boy. So we can say that the mother will not be attracted to the charge of speaking untruth even from this angle.

Just like the mother of the child in our story, the *shruti mAta,* Mother Veda, who is our well-wisher, too brings in several metaphors to make us shed the attachment to the illusory body. If only we can understand the correct meaning of the metaphors will we be able to appreciate the value of the scriptures as the means to the Knowledge of the Self.

71. HOW LONG SHOULD ONE INQUIRE?

Vasishta: A man should always engage in inquiring into the Truth. There is no set time limit as to how long the inquiry should go on. It should be done till the mind is totally free from doubt and attains peace. The same is expressed in the following sloka.

तावद्विचारयेत्प्राज्ञो यावद्विश्रान्तिमात्मनि ।
संप्रयात्यपुनर्नाशां शान्तिं तुर्यपदाभिधाम् ।।

tāvadvicārayetprājño yāvadviśrāntimātmani |
saṃprayātyapunarnāśāṃ śāntiṃ turyapadābhidhām ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 9

The tranquil state of mind free of all doubts is called t*urIya avastha* (The Fourth State). It is also called *saptama bhumika* (The Seventh Stage). For one who attains the *turIyaavastha*, there is no action to be done either in this world or in the next world. He has no obligatory works to be performed whether he is a householder or mendicant. He will have no mental projections(*vikshepa*-s*)* whether he is alive or dead, whether he is doing any work or not. There will be no changes. His condition would be like -

निर्मन्दर इवाम्भोधिः *nirmandara ivāmbhodhiḥ*
Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 11

His state will be like the State of the Milky Ocean after pulling out the Mandara Mountain which was until then used for rigorous churning of the ocean waters.

Just as the ocean rendered highly turbulent due to the churning process, becomes calm after the churning and the mountain is pulled out, the inquirer's mind too will become quiet and peaceful, free of doubts.

[**Note:** The allusion here is to the story of churning the Milky Ocean using the huge Mandara Mountain by the teams of Gods and Demons, in which process the elixir of life (*amRRita*), Goddess of Wealth, Moon etc. were produced.]

स तिष्ठति यथास्थितम्

sa tiṣṭhati yathāsthitam

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 11

Having attained the Fourth State (i.e. other than the awake, dream and the deep sleep states), he will be in his natural condition (true form).

When a spiritual sermon is sprinkled with metaphors as above, one should be able to grasp the inherent central message. Instead, if one is lost in analyzing the nitty-gritty of the analogy, he is called a rat for awakening. There are two dangers that arise out of such an attitude. Firstly, such a person will come up with strange interpretations for the knowledge and the tools used in teaching. He will argue that it is a waste of time to inquire intoTruth. Secondly, he will be unable to give up his temptations of the world. Further, such methods of attaining the Self-Knowledge through such processes as the control of the sensual pleasures etc. would be negated by him using warped logic.

Therefore, Rama, it is of utmost importance that a sincere and committed seeker should not allow such an attitude of a rat for awakening. He should follow up his inquiry process utilizing proper scriptural means to gain the Knowledge of the Self.

72. DIRECT PERCEPTION

Vasishta: What constitutes the means to knowledge (*pramANa*) ?

सर्वप्रमाणसत्तानां पदमब्धिरपामिव ।
प्रमाणमेकमेवेह प्रत्यक्षं तदतः शृणु ।।

sarvapramāṇasattānāṃ padamabdhirapāmiva |
pramāṇamekameveha pratyakṣaṃ tadataḥ śṛṇu ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 16

Direct perception is the best means (*pramANa*) to gain knowledge. In fact, it is the only *pramāṇa* acceptable (e*kameveha).* Are there then no other means available ? There are; but all of them ultimately converge into direct perception.

There are many water bodies on the surface of the earth. The water from the oceans evaporates to become the clouds and reach the land as rain. The rain water collected in the lakes, ponds, reservoirs, streams and rivers goes finally back to the ocean. The rivers flow directly into the seas. Water evaporates from the lake and pond surfaces during summer and eventually reaches the sea. In the same way, all varieties of *pramāṇa* originate from direct perception and finally merge back into it. Therefore, I hold that direct perception is the only *pramāṇa.* But then, what is direct perception?

That which produces true knowledge is called a *pramāṇa* (the means of knowledge). Out of the various tools and methods available for this, the five sensory organs are the most important instruments. Hence the five sensory organs are the instruments of direct perception. We may call this level one.

We are aware of the working of the sensory organs, when they are off and on (e.g. closing and opening of the eye lids) or when they move without any other external help. We sense the sensory organs by ourselves without any other sensors. This sensing is called 'knowing.' Because this 'knowing' knows the senses also, it is more primary than even the sensory organs. Hence 'knowingness' is the ultimate direct perception.

Knowingness gives us the knowledge about not only the sensory organs but also the senses which are the perceptors, the objects that are perceived called percepts and the act of perceiving. Knowingness gives us the feeling of experiencing the three – perceptors (*draṣṭa*), the percepts (*dṛśya*) and the act of perceiving (*darśana*). The threesome of the observer, the observed and the act of observing is called *tripuṭi* (triad). Thus, what makes us aware of the triad is also 'knowingness.'

By giving the label 'knowingness,' it may sound like an unknown entity. But if we think over a bit on who is actually aware of the movement of the sensory organs, we find that it is none other than the 'individual' inside 'me.' Therefore, the knowledge or the individual (*jīva*) is one and the same. Or, knowingness is the 'me' inside me!

We have already understood that 'knowing' is another name for direct perception. We have now determined that knowingness is none other than the individual in me. Therefore, we have given the name 'direct perception' to that individual inside me. That's about all.

प्रत्यक्षमिति नामेह कृतं जीवः स एव नः

pratyakṣamiti nāmeha kṛtaṃ jīvaḥ sa eva naḥ

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 18

There are many names for '*jīva*'. They are '*sākśi*' (witness), '*sākśi caitanya*' (witness consciousness), '*anubhuti*' (experiential knowledge), '*pratipatti*' (observation), '*pratyakśa*' (direction perception). These are different names but what they connote is only one thing -- *'chaitanya'* (consciousness). That consciousness is the direct perception.

It has five names :

1. Direct perception
2. Experiential knowledge
3. Observation
4. Individual
5. Sensation.

Though these five names are synonymous in one way, there is a technical difference. Each name is used in a specific context as explained below -

1. When the witnessing consciousness permeates the triad of observer-observed-observing and produces the sensation of knowing at a transactional level, it is called 'Direct perception'.
2. When the same consciousness conforming to the triad gives rise to the experiential feeling of knowing, it is called 'Experiential knowledge'.
3. When the same consciousness permeates the triad, it is called 'Observation'.
4. When the same consciousness exists within the life-breath,it is called the 'Individual'.
5. When the same consciousness illuminates the triad and thus makes them known, it is called 'Sensation'.

73. KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THE SENSES

Note: A little introduction is needed to understand the issues discussed by Maharshi Vasishta at this point. Considerable thought has been expended in Vedanta about how a man gets the knowledge of a thing when he perceives it through his senses. Without getting into too much of technical details on the subject, the essence of Vedantic understanding is given below:

Vasishta: The mind or *antaḥkaraṇa* is the inner organ. It has no specific shape of its own. Its natural quality is *taijasa* or 'shining.' It is a substance which is pure, transparent and lustrous like the ray of the sun. It tends to flow out of the body through the five 'conduit-like' senses. If there is no obstruction, it reaches out and occupies the object that pertains to that specific sense.

For instance, let us take the eye. The eye perceives shape. Imagine a large water reservoir with some farmland below (command area). If you open the sluice of the reservoir, the water suddenly gushes out and flows into the farmland. If the farmland is in the shape of a square, the water also assumes the form of a square. If the farm has a triangular shape, the water also spreads into a triangular form.

Likewise, think of the inner organ as the water tank, the eyes as the conduits and the eyelids as sluices. When the eyelids open, the inner organ (consciousness) flows out and reaches the object in front of it. It assumes the shape of that object. Suppose, there is a tree in-between. The inner organ which flows out of the eyes travels up to the tree (just as the water in the tank flows into the field), falls on the tree, and assumes the shape of that tree. Then the individual (*jīva*) gets the knowledge that he is seeing the tree.

Similarly, the inner organ flows out through the ear. Suppose a bell is ringing at a distance. The inner organ goes to the place from where the sound of the bell has come and assumes the shape of that particular sound. The inner organ flows out in the same way through different senses to the objects, and assumes the shape of those things. The transformation of the inner organ is called '*antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti.*' To put it in simple words, a thought that occurs in the mind about a thing is called *'vṝitti'* or *'citta vṝitti'* or *'antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti'*

74. vṝitti vyāpti – phalavyāpti

Vasishta: Rama! You know what a *vṝitti* means ! When the witness consciousness permeates the *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti* (in other words takes the shape of the *antaḥkaraṇa*), that consciousness is called *'samvit'.* There is one *'ahaṃ vṛitti'* in *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti*. Its nature is to express 'I'. When the consciousness enters this '*ahaṃ vṛitti*,then it is called *'pramāta' or 'puruṣa'*.

The consciousness is also called *'padārdha' (matter) or 'viṣaya'* (object). Let me explain these terms.

Suppose there is a tree in front of a man. His eyesight is normal. His eyes are wide open.There is adequate light. Even so, he does not see the tree. Why? You would say that he is inattentive, his mind is elsewhere. What exactly does it mean? His consciousness did not flow out through his eye and had not assumed the shape of the tree. Had it done so, he would have seen the tree. What is the reason for the tree being seen only when the consciousness assumes the shape of the tree? To find the answer, we must know what the tree is.

Everything in this creation is a transfiguration (a disguise) of *brahman* only - *brahman* that is self-effulgent. When *brahman* assumes the shape of inert things, the darkness of ignorance pervades them. So, they fail to shine by themselves. When an individual's consciousness reaches that thing, the ignorance enveloping that thing is removed. That is called *'vṝitti vyāpti'*

Once the veil of ignorance is removed, the consciousness within that *'vṝitti'* illuminates the object and makes the thing known. This is called *'phalavyāpti'*.

[**Note:** For the sake of more clarity to the readers to understand the terms *'vṝitti vyāpti'* and '*phalavyāpti*' , let us do a 'thought' experiment. Say, you are made to sit in a dark room. There is a table in front of you and on that table is a diamond. There is also a black curtain between you and the table. You are asked whether you can see that diamond ? You say, "No" and, some one has removed the curtain. You are again asked, "Do you see now?" You again say,'no.' Then a light is switched on. The diamond is now seen clearly.

In this world, the ignorance that envelops every inert (non-sentient) thing is like the curtain in this story. The *'vṛitti'* of the inner organ (mind) removes the curtain. This is *'vṛitti vyāpti'*. Yet that thing is not known. Then the consciousness along with the *vṛitti* of the inner organ acts like the light, then you see the thing. This is *phalavyApti*. In our story, we depicted that the removal of the curtain and switching on the light had happened one after the other. But in real life, both *vṛitti vyāpti*
and *'phalavyāpti'* occur at the same time.]

75. ONE CONSCIOUSNESS BUT MANY NAMES

If there is an object at a place, when your *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti* reaches it, and the veil of ignorance surrounding the object is removed, you get the knowledge that "I have seen a certain thing." But what exactly is it in the form of that "thing" there? It is also Consciousness. That is the reason it is named *padārdha or viṣaya* (substance or object). *padārdha* is Consciousness in that particular state wherein the enveloping ignorance is removed by the *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti.* When the external veil is removed by the *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti* ,the consciousness present there is called '*viṣaya*' or "*padārdha*' (things or matter).

If the Witness Consciousness makes the *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti* as its vehicle, then it is called *samvit*. If the same Witness Consciousness makes the *ahaṃvṛitti* (which is a part of the *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti*), it gets the name of *praṃata*. When the external veil covering the Witness Consciousness is removed by *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti*, then the name given to Witness Consciousness is *viṣaya* (object). Thus, the same Consciousness gets different names depending on its state.

Do not feel that I am confusing you by reeling out a bagful of names. Waves rise in the sea and fall down. As a result, there will be some spume, some foam, some bubbles, some sprinkles of water. Whether it is in the form of sprinkles, foam, spume or bubbles or the sea, everything is only water. But because everything is water, you cannot call the bubbles sea.You cannot show the sea, and say it is foam. Though it is all water, it gets a different name depending on the state it is in. Similarly, Consciousness is One but is referred to by diverse names depending on the state it is in. Since the nature of Consciousness is very difficult to comprehend, it is better we study it in its different states under different names.

76. INQUIRY AT THE STAGE OF LIBERATION

Rama! We have been discussing the method of inquiry into the ultimate Truth and said that the inquiry should be based on valid means of Knowledge (i.e.proper *pramāṇa*). We went on examining what constitutes proper *pramāṇa* and in that process we have come to understand a bit about the nature of Consciousness Itself.

Just as the ocean is one without any division or separate forms before the rise of waves etc. in it, Consciousness too is One without any modifications prior to creation. In that position, it was not a cause for anything. After that, it created causality within itself. That is to say that it imagined a non-existing causality to be present within itself. As a result of that imaginary causation, it has manifested in the form of the world. Therefore, we have to understand that the entire world is a superimposition on *brahman*.

If we are able to ingest the above fact, it will be clear to us that the world is illusory. Each individual has to work out all this on his/her own and eradicate by himself/herself the ignorance that is causal for the imagined world. That is the ultimate purpose of human pursuit (*puruṣārtha*). That is the final outcome of the inquiry into the ultimate Truth through the valid means of Knowledge.

We have also said that ignorance will be removed, and the mind will calm down as a result of proper inquiry. We have said that such inquiry leads to liberation. Some people doubt if the inquiry has to continue on even at the stage of liberation. There is no need to entertain such misgiving at all. After all, any inquiry will be based on words and the meanings ascribed to those words. And all words and their meanings are part of the world which is an imaginary creation. Moreover, the meanings of the words depend on the sensory and motor organs of the body. From the inquiry we conduct through the word meanings, the mind, the sensory and motor organs, the entire world will all be 'Quieted', ie 'stilled, without movement'. When one reaches this position, there is no possibility for any words or sounds to exist. In the absence of words and word meanings, there is no scope at all for an 'inquiry.' Hence, one need not be under the apprehension that the inquiry will cling on even after attaining liberation.

Once an individual attains liberation, the body may be alive because of its *prArabdha*. But for that individual, the world or the body which is a part of the world, or the sensory and motor organs which are a part of the body or movement (which is a part of the organs) will exist merely fallaciously and not truly. Because the movement in the organs is only an appearance and not true, that individual will not have either doership or experiencership.

मनस्यनीहिते शान्ते न प्रवर्तन्त एव ते ।
कर्मेन्द्रियाणि कर्मादावसंचारितयन्त्रवत् ।।

manasyanīhite śānte na pravartanta eva te |
karmendriyāṇi karmādāvasaṃcāritayantravat ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 26

The mind is placid in liberation. There will be no movement in it and hence no desires. In the absence of desire, the action organs (the five motor organs) stay still like a vehicle that's not started. That is the stage of *jīvanmukti* (liberation right in this body). Previously it was described with the simile of slightly fried seeds. Now it is compared to a vehicle at a stand still.

There is another metaphor used to express the state of a *jīvanmukta* (a man who attained *jīvanmukti* is called a *jīvanmukta*). The movement of the sensory organs and life- force of a *jīvanmukta* is like the movement of two wooden ram dolls in a fight. Suppose you carve two wooden ram dolls and fix wheels to their legs. Tie strings to their tails and move them like two puppets in a fight. They may appear to be crashing into each other. When real rams fight, there will be thinking in their minds. The wooden dolls of the rams will have no thinking in their minds. A *jīvanmukta*'s conduct will be like that of the wooden doll rams. There is thus no scope for inquiry to continue after liberation. One need not be apprehensive that inquiry will persist even in the position of *jīvanmukti*.

77. WHICH IS FIRST – MIND OR MATTER?

Vasishta: Rama! The metaphor of wooden rams raises another question. There is a man who pulls the strings for their movement. Who is the cause for the movement in the senses of a liberated man (*jīvanmukta*) ?

Normally, it is the mind that moves the senses of a man. Desires move the mind. Desires are moved by the knowledge of the objects in the world. I referred to them previously as the *spanda trayam* (The Triad of Throbs) -- *indriya spanda, mānas spanda* and *samvit spanda*. Irrespective of the name we give, the conclusion was that a man should first have knowledge of the objects of the world for the senses to act. It would naturally imply then that the objects should pre-exist the man.

But it is in stark contrast to what we understood a while ago. During our discussion earlier, we said that all the objects of the world are pervaded by the mind. It means that the objects came into existence because of the mind. In other words, objects appear only when there is a movement in the mind. It would then mean that the movement in the mind is prior to the appearance of the objects.

On one hand we say that objects cannot arise unless there is a movement in the mind. On other hand we hold that there cannot be a movement in the mind unless there is a prior knowledge of the objects in the mind. Apparently there seems to be a defect in the logic -- called *anyonya āśraya doṣa* (The defect of Mutual Dependence).

The above situation may sound like a conundrum to some people. But there is no confusion.The world has been forever within the Consciousness-Self. When there is a *samvit spanda* (a throb in Knowledge or Consciousness), the world manifests itself. That is the nature of the Consciousness-Self. As an effect of the beginningless *māyā* and the effects related to the past movements in Consciousness, a movement takes place in the mind (*mānasa spanda*). The movement in the mind engenders the objects in the world. This goes on as an endless cycle. Let me explain this with an illustration.

We have air here all around. But how do you know that? You know it when there is movement in the air and it touches your skin. That means you say that there is air around when a movement is felt by you. But there cannot be a movement in the air unless there is air. This situation appears to be a case of mutual dependence (*anyonya āśraya*). But air has the quality of movement within itself. Because of that fact only, it moves and then you get the feeling that there is a breeze. Since movement is intrinsic to the air, we have to say that the situation does not attract the logical defect of mutual dependence.

Extending the above analysis to Consciousness-Self, it is clear that there is no defect of mutual dependence in logic. Just like the air, Consciousness is all pervasive. When a specific individual has to experience the movement of air, all things will coalesce in such a way that a movement in the air takes place and he will experience the cool air.

When a particular person has to undergo certain experiences as a result of his/her past actions, it appears as though a human form has originated within the Consciousness-Self. In the same way several things coalesce to produce a ripple in the air, congenial space-time and other factors join together in the appearance of an individual. Everyone then says, "Mr. So- and-so is born." Leave what the public says, what does that individual himself think? If he is an accomplished individual with fructified self-inquiry and knows that he is himself the Consciousness-Self, he would understand that a human form has arisen within himself like a ripple on the water surface. But an ordinary person in ignorance would think that that particular human form is who he is, and he relishes in being that form.

Rama! Have you noticed the meandering twists and turns in our discourse ? We have taken up the question whether the process of Self-inquiry would persist even after the attainment of liberation. We said that it would not. We said that the position of a liberated individual will be like that of a vehicle that is not started (i.e. stands still and not in motion). This has given rise to the question on the defect of mutual dependence in logic between the movement in the mind causing the appearance of objects and the knowledge of objects causing the movement in the mind. We have now established that there is no such logical inconsistency in the argument. Thus we confirmed once again that the process of inquiry does not persist beyond liberation. Therefore, Rama, proceed with your Self-inquiry without any hesitation adopting the scriptures as the valid means to attain the absolute Knowledge.

78. *Brahman* AND THE WORLD

Vasishta: During our discussion on the logical defect of mutual dependence in our argument, we said that the objective world is intrinsic to the nature of Pure Consciousness-Self like air having the property of movement intrinsic to it. Such a formulation may mislead one to infer that Pure Consciousness is the cause for the evolution of the world like clay is causal for the pots. The statement would imply that causality is in the nature of Consciousness-Self. In other words it would imply causality is an attribute for *brahman*. This would be in direct contradiction to our earlier understanding that Consciousness-Self does not cause anything.

Further, the presence of causality will attract the cause-effect relationship and hence, there will always be some effects associated with causes. So, Consciousness-Self (i.e. *brahman*) has to co-exist with effects. If so, it would violate the *shruti* statement that *brahman* alone is and there is no second to *brahman*. All of this is totally against all the characteristics of what *brahman* is.

Therefore, Consciousness-Self cannot be the cause for the evolving of the world. That being so, we have to say that the world has manifested as a changeless change (*vivarta*) of *brahman*! You may recall that we talked of changeless change (*vivarta*) in connection with the arising of a snake in a rope when the rope is mistakenly seen to be a snake. Just as the rope has been a cause to bring about a changeless change in itself for the appearance of a snake, Consciousness-Self is the cause to bring about a changeless change in Itself for the appearance of a world. Just as the snake is purely imaginary and does not have true existence, it amounts to say that the world is purely imaginary like the snake because any 'thing' that is generated through changeless change has to be an illusion.

If the genesis of the world is merely an imagination and has no reality to it, it would automatically make the causality we have given to Consciousness-Self for the genesis of the world be an imagination only. It is not real. Once the causality is proved to be illusory, we will not violate the Vedic statements that *brahman* is not a cause for anything and there is no second thing other than *brahman*.

If, the visible apparent world is merely an imagination and Consciousness-Self is the Seer (*draṣṭa*). Let us for a moment assume that he evolved into the visible world not through changeless change but as an effect of a cause. What would happen to the Seer in that case ?

Suppose we request a carpenter to carve out a nice elephant out of a single log of wood. He cuts a suitable tree of adequate dimensions and carves out a large elephant out of the stout stem of the tree. The tree is changed into an elephant by this process. If you now desire to have the tree back for some reason, would it be possible for you to change the elephant back again as the tree? Because the elephant idol was made out of the tree, will it be able to discharge any of the functions of the tree? These are impossible situations.That means in the process of modification from the form of a tree to that of an elephant, the original cause will not exist anymore once the effect is born.

If we accept that the world is born as a modification of *brahman*, there is therefore, no scope for the Seer *brahman* to continue to exist anymore. If we agree to this (that *brahman* does not exist anymore), it amounts to say that the world which is the 'seen' will exist in the absence of the Seer. Is it possible for a 'seen' thing to exist when there is no Seer? That is not possible. Hence, our assumption that the visible world has generated out of *brahman* as a modification of *brahman* is incorrect.

All of this leaves us with only one option. We have to admit that this world has come into being as an imagination through the process of a changeless change (*vivarta*). That means the entire world is no more than an illusory appearance like the snake on a rope. Then *brahman* will not be causal for the origination of the world nor would lose being Non-dual.

When I said that the world is intrinsically present within *brahman* in order to deny the defect of mutual dependence in the movement of mind and objects, you have to appreciate that *brahman* is an imaginary cause for a changeless change. It should not be interpreted in any other way. I elaborated so much on this point to highlight this aspect.

The substantial entity behind direct perception is essentially the Consciousness-Self. In order to understand Its nature, one should proceed with Self-inquiry through valid means of knowledge. You may ask about using other *pramāṇa*-s like that of the word (*shabda*), inference (*anumāna*) etc. All of those are also required. But the main point is - any of these other means to the knowledge will finally take us to the same direct perception by which we confirm our experiential understanding. Moreover, the validity of the inferential and other *pramāṇa*-s is dependent on the direct perception only. As I already pointed out, direct perception is none other than Consciousness-Self.

79. CONDUCT OF A SEEKER

विचारयाचार्यपरम्पराणां मतेन सत्येन सितेन तावत् ।
यावद्विशुद्धं स्वयमेव बुद्धया ह्यनन्तरूपं परमभ्युपैषि ।।

vicārayācāryaparamparāṇāṃ
matena satyena sitena tāvat |
yāvadviśuddhaṃ svayameva buddhayā
hyanantarūpaṃ paramabhyupaiṣi ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 35

Vasishta: Rama! Never should you leave the human effort. Continue on with Self-inquiry in the tradition of noble teachers following a blemishless path. The inquiry should go on till you have the experiential realization of the infinite Self within yourself."

[**Note:** Sage Vasishta in his discourse thus far indicated the broad outline of his plan of teaching and also gave a brief summary of the main points of Advaita Vedanta he proposed to impart to Sri Rama. He intends to now instruct Rama to find a competent and knowledgeable teacher. He also wishes to speak about the way a seeker has to acquire knowledge from traditional teachers. With this in mind, he continued his discourse into the 20th *sarga* describing the noble qualities a venerable teacher would have.]

Vasishta: "Rama !A seeker should acquire the Sixfold Treasures of Seeking (*śama, dama* etc.). Two principal means are then available for him to improve his knowledge of Consciousness-Self. They are:

1. Association with noble people; and
2. Scriptural logic.

Therefore, upfront the seeker has to choose intelligently the company he keeps and also the scriptures he studies. By doing so, he will be able to absorb the good qualities from noble people. It is not possible that all the desirable qualities will be available in one individual. Hence the seeker should acquire good qualities trying to learn from different people whatever quality they excel in. He has to endeavor to develop his intellectual capability. Noble people are those who have obtained the Sixfold Treasures of *śama, dama* and so on and also have got complete Self-Knowledge.They are to be revered. A seeker should achieve both – the Sixfold Treasures and also Self-Knowledge. One will not be liberated unless both are obtained. The Sixfold Treasures and Knowledge mutually re-inforce each other. It is like the relationship between rain and conducting sacrificial rituals. With good rains, there will be better crop yields and with the resources obtained, people will perform more sacrificial rituals. More rituals means more rain. Likewise, with the acquisition of the *śama, dama* etc. his conduct will become noble. Because of the mutual inter-relationship between these, if a seeker masters any one of them, the others will also automatically be obtained.

It is customary in the villages to entrust the protection of crops from damage by birds to the young daughters of the farmers because all the male members work hard in the fields. The girls sit on an elevated platform and scare away the birds with their clapping. To avoid boredom, they sing songs and clap for rhythm. By this dual process, the girls improve their singing abilities and also crops are protected from the birds. Likewise, if a seeker sincerely acquires *śama, dama* etc., he will also obtain knowledge just like the singing improves with rhythmic clappings. Or if he acquires good knowledge, the qualities of *śama, dama* etc. will follow like the rhythm follows the music.

Rama! I have explained to you the conduct and behavior of a sincere aspirant for liberation. With this the second chapter in my scheme of teaching comes to an end.

तथोपदिश्यते सम्यगेवं ज्ञानक्रमोऽधुना ।।

tathopadiśyate samyagevaṃ jñānakramo'dhunā ||

Mumukshu Vyvahara Prakarana, Sarga 20, Sloka 12

We shall next take up Knowledge of the Self in a stepwise fashion.The first step in this process is the origin of the world. I have already informed you that I shall discuss in the next chapter how the creation of the entire world is nothing but the result of mentation and how it expands with imagination. Let us now take up the Origin of the world.

80. REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

All the scriptural texts hold that it is mandatory for a spiritual aspirant to obtain the Fourfold Aids of seeking before he / she launches himself on to acquire the Knowledge of the Self. Yoga Vasishta too prescribes the same in its own style in the first chapter on detachment. Intense desire for liberation occupies the top position among the four aids of seeking. Seekers reach this stage from different perspectives and through different paths. As a result, they remain unsure of many issues and are swarmed by innumerable doubts. Two questions are uppermost in their minds – one: how to bring order and discipline into their lives; and two: how should they conduct themselves. Usually texts on Vedanta do not deal with these questions. But Sage Valmiki, out of his compassion for the seekers, devotes a whole chapter to this topic.

In order to demonstrate the different approaches available for liberation, Sage Valmiki opens the second chapter with the dialogues between Sage Vyasa and Suka and King Janaka and Suka. He captures the essence of those two conversations in a concise expression :

स्वसंकल्पवशाद्बद्धो निःसंकल्पश्च मुच्यते ।।

svasaṃkalpavaśādbaddho niḥsaṃkalpaśca mucyate ||

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 1, Sloka 36

Meaning: Bondage comes from intentions (desires). Liberation is to be free of all desirers.

It is the crux of the whole theory of Vedanta. This significant statement comes so much ahead of all other teaching because it was Sage Viswamitra who pronounced it. Inspired by the words of Sage Narada, Sage Viswamitra enthusiastically begins his sermon to Rama on Self-Knowledge. But soon he realizes that his teaching was not proceeding in a proper manner and requests Sage Vasishta to take over the responsibility of teaching Rama.

With that Sage Vasishta's discourses commence. He conceived of a systematic plan of imparting the Supreme Knowledge to Rama. With a carefully drawn plan in his mind, Sage Vaishta talked first about the Consciousness-space, mind-space and awake-space.

Next Sage Vasishta emphasized on practice and discipline. Then he provided a summary of the theory and clarified on some of the technical terms. He strongly denounces the lazy-man concept that practice is also at the mercy of God. His presentation on this topic extends to several *sarga*-s.

As a background to the above point, he narrated the life-stories of authentic *jīvanmukta*-s like Vyasa, Suka, Viswamitra and others. He also spoke elaborately on the four means of seeking – Calmness, Inquiry, Contentment and Association with noble people and the three enablers to obtain them, viz., proper conduct, right scriptures and association with holy people. In order to deny the lethargy which is detrimental to active practice, he explained that the entire world is a space of movement. In this context, he introduced three new terms – movement in Knowledge, movement in the mind and movement in the organs.

Sage Vasishta compared destiny to open space and underlined the importance of making every effort to overcome the undesirable tendencies which resulted from the effects of past actions. He said that noble thoughts would help in this. Next the Sage narrated how the Knowledge of Self was imparted by the Creator to him as a part of introducing the ultimate Knowledge to the seeker who successfully overcame his unwanted tendencies through his own effort. In this context, he explained about the natural principle *niyati* (inner order) which he would be further discussing later on during his teaching.

The Sage compared the four means of practice that he discussed previously – viz. Calmness, Inquiry, Contentment and Association with noble people- to four gatekeepers at the door that leads to salvation and declared that mastering anyone of the techniques would help in mastering all the others. He indirectly supported the three steps of listening to scriptures, reflection on what is heard and deep contemplative meditation as the path for liberation. However, he said that calmness and inquiry are more important. From here on Sage Valmiki introduced referencing Sage Vasishta's discourses by specific canto and verse numbers. Sage Vasishta made a strange proposition that in every subatom of a sand grain, there were thousands of worlds. This statement came up when he was pointing to the illusory nature of the world which he taught as a prelude to taking up the main subject of teaching – the Knowledge of the Self. He did not expand on this theme beyond mentioning that it would be dealt with in greater detail in the final chapter.

The Sage made one more unusual proposition that the awake and dream states were alike while talking about a few technical matters like the ephemeral and empirical realities, analogies and metaphors etc. used in teaching about the Supreme Self. He stated that direct perception is the only valid means of knowledge out of all the available means of knowledge.

He announced:

प्रमाणमेकमेवेह प्रत्यक्षं *pramāṇamekameveha pratyakṣaṃ*

Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana, Sarga 19, Sloka 16

This is yet again one more ground breaking new concept that the Sage introduced here.

Based on the above proposal, the Sage discussed briefly the origin of the world and indicated that the visible world was a changeless change of Consciousness-Self, *brahman*. At this point he took a step back from the technical explanation and talked about the conduct and behavior of a committed seeker. He strongly advocated that a sincere seeker should study the scriptures from a competent teacher, reflect on what was learnt and continue the process of inquiry until the seeker would experientially realize the ultimate Truth by himself within himself. Underlining the importance of constant inquiry till the goal is achieved, the Sage closed the second chapter on the behavior and conduct of an aspirant for liberation.

****